

# 1 Ralph Ashton

Tapes 346, 347; 352 & 353

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, 18 July 2003 and 19 September 2003

Transcribed by Marilyn Hunting

The interview was conducted at Ralph's home: 908 E. South Temple, SLC, UT 84102

Ralph Ashton: I was born in a small home in Roosevelt, Utah. The reason I was born in a home is they had no hospital at that time. All the births were in private homes. I moved to Vernal when I was less than a year old and lived there [afterward]. My parents were Eva Stewart and Rae Ashton. My wife is Virginia Walker Ashton. I have four children: Michael S., R. Larry, Ginny [Virginia A. Bostrom] and Marge [Marjorie A. Coleman]. They all live here in Salt Lake City with the exception of our son, Michael, who lives in Hamburg, Germany.

We lived in a 940-square-foot home in Vernal—two small bedrooms, one bathroom, kitchen and a small living room. Not too many large homes in Vernal in those days. It was on 4<sup>th</sup> South between First and Second West. It is still there and a family by the name of Estes lives there now. I planted every tree that is there, probably the largest blue spruce and red cedars in the whole area.

I attended Central School, Uintah Jr. High School and left to attend Wastach Academy in Mt. Pleasant, Utah. Central School was from the first to the sixth grade, small classrooms that held about fifteen students. Uintah Jr. High had classes about the same size, all good, homespun teachers in those days, very dedicated to their students.

Kathleen Irving (KI): Do you remember some of their names?

Ralph: Yes, I remember some of their names very well. In fact, one of my favorite teachers, and she was also my son's favorite teacher, was Vera Showalter [Gee]. Her son happens to be Gordon Gee, who is chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Got one of the most plum jobs. In fact, at one time he was president of West Virginia, president of BYU, president of Colorado—just kept getting upgraded—then president of Ohio State, then Brown University. He left for his lifetime desire at Vanderbilt University. That was okay.

Vera was a very good teacher. Her husband, Elwood Gee, was also my teacher in the Jr. High School. She taught me and my two sons in the second and third grades.

KI: Sounds like she did a good job with her children.

Ralph: Oh, she did for this guy to come out like that. He was also offered to be the head of all the universities in California, which included over 100,000 students. He turned that down because a very close friend of his, that was instrumental in all of this, told him he would be on the road all the time and not be able to stay home much.

The subjects I liked to study in school were arithmetic, geography and history. In my free time, back in those days when we were very small, we played spot ball, kick the can, hide and seek, foot races and tackle the flag.

KI: Did you have to work a lot when you were a child?

Ralph: Yes.

KI: Your dad already had a business.

Ralph: I'll come into that on some of the things you have here. My friends were all school children. The two best friends were Paul Stringham, who became a well known doctor, and Clayton Findlay, who served in the Air Corps in World War II. He flew the "Hump" in the Himalayas and retired years later with the rank of colonel.

My pets: I don't know if they were pets or not, but I took care of small lambs that my father took in on store bills. We did a lot of business on the barter system. We had bins of everything in the barter system. So many people didn't have [anything]. My father, who was written up, I think, kept the stockmen alive and the sheepmen from going [under] because he extended them credit and everything else, otherwise they never would have made it.

KI: Where did he get his capital? How was he able to buy things?

Ralph: He was working on a borderline, too. In fact, N.J. Meagher, who was the head of the bank, wanted him to be on the board of directors. He said, "Rae, you could be a pretty wealthy guy if you would just quit giving all this [credit]." He said, "N.J., if I didn't do what I did with the stockmen, the farmers and everybody else, you wouldn't have a bank." That was true.

My dad did the store business and they worked in there, my mother and father both, from six o'clock in the morning till about eight or nine at night. 'Course, they didn't have any money because of all they did on credit. And never once were they paid back over the course of the years; from all these people, thousands and thousands, a lot of money. But anyway...

Dancing. I wasn't much of a dancer, but I played George Washington in a play and danced the minuet with Martha Washington and I did a few more of those things. Did a tap dancing scene one time, and after I got through, Helen Tenny was the instructor, she said, "I'm glad not too many people are going to be able to see that."

KI: Do you remember who Martha Washington was?

Ralph: I don't, I wish I could.

KI: Were you in grade school then?

Ralph: Yes. It could have been Afton Carter.

About my childhood and school days: In the fourth grade a cronie of mine and I bought a bunch of rotten bananas and we brought them to school, because of my father having the store. We rang the fire bell and when the students filed out we hit them with a barrage of these rotten

bananas. The first target was John Louie Siddoway who caught one smack in the face. John Louie later became a pediatrician in Salt Lake City. He took care of our granddaughters.

Back to the banana episode: Mrs. Iris White, our teacher, was a very powerful woman; she took me into her office and proceeded to lash me with a small bullwhip. I never dared show my parents those marks because I would have probably gotten another when they found out. Years and years later they found out about these things.

KI: I'm surprised the teacher or principal didn't call your parents and tell them what you had done.

Ralph: I am too, but they didn't. After school one day I approached a friend and put cockleburs in her hair. Another working over I got, because her mother had to almost shave her head to remove the cockleburs. She was Doris Preece Merrill, a sister to Ralph Preece.

Another time I caught Raphael Olsen, took his pants off and threw them up on the telephone line. Unfortunately, he was the son of the assistant principal. The next day the superintendent had me come in where he actually hit me with his fist. No, I did not tell my parents like they do these days or I would have gotten another beating. I told my folks I got the bruises from another fight.

KI: You were really quite a character, weren't you?

Ralph: But as Virginia said, nowadays the parents would go and beat up on the teacher.

Since my parents worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day, I had a lot of free time. As we all know idle hands breed trouble. I escalated my escapades to the point that the law told my folks to either send me away to school, because I was the leader, or they would send me to a reform school. That's how I wound up at Wasatch Academy.

KI: I can believe that.

Ralph: We also tipped over outhouses on Halloween. One time as we pushed one over, there was a wild yell from inside, it was the owner. I'll never forget that.

KI: If you were the ringleader, were these guys you told me about before with you, Paul Stringham?

Ralph: Nope, it was amazing, Paul and Clayton Findlay were neither one with me on this one, I had some others. Clifford (Cliff) Carter was one of them, I think Woody Searle, you remember Woody Searle? Woody was older. Another one was Woodard Collier, [and] one of the Coltharp boys, you remember the name of Coltharp.

KI: Well, the Colliers had the furniture store.

Ralph: Yeah, that's right.

KI: Who was the law that came down on you? Do you remember who it was?

Ralph: I sure do, the sheriff was Frank Swain, who later became the chief law officer at Bingham. Cleaned up Bingham Canyon. He was really a tough lawman. That's funny I remember that name. I don't think I would have if you hadn't asked me.

Another time, we would hitch our sleds to buggies for a fast ride. Sometimes we would get a going-over from the guy that had the whip there, too. Also we jumped in the ice man's vehicle and stole ice.

About chores: I mowed lawns for ten cents a lawn, sold magazines and papers, ran errands for older people. Sometimes I would get a nickel for these errands, depends on what the errand was. I delivered goods to customers' buggies, wagons and Model Ts. One elderly lady who favored me was Josie Bassett of the Butch Cassidy gang. She had a small, one-horse buggy that she traveled in some twenty-five to thirty miles to come and pick up goods at the store.

KI: Was that from Cub Creek?

Ralph: Yes, right.

KI: You seem to have really reformed when you got to Wasatch.

Ralph: Oh, yeah! I did. Yeah, that's amazing. They had received this information from—I don't know where it came from, from the law people or from my folks, but they let me know. The superintendent let me know that if there was any of this kind of stuff here, I wouldn't last two weeks. It kind of made a believer of me. Well, you didn't have any free time and there was no place to go.

I remember calling up my parents after two weeks and said, "I'm coming home, I hate this place." They said, "If you're coming home, you better find another place to live because you won't be living with us." So that took care of that.

KI: Did your brother go to school at Wasatch?

Ralph: He went to Wasatch before I did. That's how I happened to go there to school instead of someplace else. Amazingly, on April 19, 2003, I received an award for being an Outstanding Alumnus, a great honor.

KI: That's terrific! Your brother wasn't in trouble, was he?

Ralph: No, except Paul Stringham, the doctor, well, there was a bunch of stolen goods stashed away in the barn of the Stringhams' home and Mr. [B.H.]Stringham spotted all this stuff and started asking questions. Paul and I told him it was Stew, my brother, and Steve, his brother. A gal by the name of LaVera Hudlow happened to hear the conversation and came in said, "Absolutely not, because I came in here one time when these two boys brought this stuff in."

KI: It was really you and Paul that had done it?

Ralph: Yeah. So there we go, we got in trouble again. See that was another one of the deals that sent me away.

I graduated from high school in 1940. My college was interrupted my junior year when I entered the service in World War II.

KI: You went to Stanford to college?

Ralph: Yes.

KI: Did you get a scholarship?

Ralph: No.

KI: Why did you choose to go there?

Ralph: Because my brother was down there, too.

KI: He just sort of blazed the path?

Ralph: I was a pretty good athlete in high school and I thought I could get something when I got down there, but I couldn't. It was a tough place in those days. They had fantastic championship teams of all kinds.

The kinds of foods I ate: as a schoolboy I ate eggs every morning. We also had cabbage, onions and spinach, if they were available, which was very seldom. Mother was a great cook, so we had a feast on Sunday. We would have roasted chicken or turkey and things like that. I enjoyed her cream puffs, cinnamon rolls, bread and cakes for dessert. Most of our food was meat and potatoes, like everybody else.

KI: Did you get a lot of your meat from bartering?

Ralph: Yes, oh, yeah. We would get beef from stockmen, and that's how we got that herd of lambs. We would get so much from the barter system. There wasn't too much cash exchanged in those days. Fortunately, we had that business to do it.

The kinds of clothes I wore in those days were cords, T-shirts, Levis and that sort of casual wear. There were no suits or sports coats. We didn't even know what they were.

KI: What did you go to church in?

Ralph: Just casual dress. Some of the older guys had suits and ties.

I worked for my father stocking shelves, and when I could drive, I would deliver groceries, anything, hardware, anything else to Bonanza, fifty miles away, plus to all the local people. We had quite a delivery business.

KI: What kind of car did you have?

Ralph: Model A pickup.

KI: What year?

Ralph: 1936.

I met Virginia Walker at Stanford when I returned from the service in 1946 to complete my education. She was a “Chappy” queen. Chappy was the campus humor magazine. She was a beautiful girl. It took me fifteen phone calls to get a date with her. We were married September 13, 1947, in All Saints Episcopal Church in Long Beach, California.

Vernal was a small town, eleven hundred people, in the 1920s. The transportation consisted of buggies, wagons, horseback, and some Model T Fords and a few other automobiles that had just come into the area. My grandfather, Les Ashton, had the first Buick in that entire part of the country, east of Salt Lake City.

KI: Did you know your grandpa?

Ralph: Yes, just barely. He died when I was seven years old.

This is interesting: Dick Ufford owns [my grandfather’s Buick] now and that Buick is used in many parades to this day, you have seen it. It’s the vehicle that he drives and has all the noted people in it—grand marshals, etc., that’s it. You can see how old that is.

I didn’t know that until they brought a group of them—there was a Warburton, my uncle Arden Stewart, and Dick Ufford, they came and entertained at Liberty Park and Dick came over and was talking and I said, “You still got that old vehicle that you do all the parades in?” He said, “Do you know who that belonged to?” I said, “I haven’t any idea.” He said, “Your grandfather, Les.” I said, “You mean that is *the* Buick?” And he said, “It sure is.”

As far as businesses in Vernal, there was a small bank, called the Bank of Vernal, later on became Uintah State Bank. [Ed. note: The Bank of Vernal was later acquired by Zions Bank. Uintah State Bank, located diagonally across the street, became First Security Bank and was owned by Wells Fargo in 2003.] They had three employees. We had two old-fashioned drug stores [Uintah Rexall Drug and Vernal Drug], and a flour mill. In those days most men were involved in the cattle or sheep industry. There were some mink and fox farms and chicken and eggs were a big business in those days. They shipped eggs all over the state. That was Dudley and others.

There was a blacksmith shop, remember the name of Carl Hadlock? A leather goods place that eventually made famous saddles and other leather goods that were shipped all over the country, Newton Brothers. One butcher shop, owned by Irvin Eaton. When we built our building, rather than compete against him, my mother said, “We aren’t going to let poor Irvin Eaton sit over there.” Dad said, “Well, what will we do?” He called her “Dolly Belle.” She said, “Let’s bring him over here and put him in the butcher shop here.” So that’s what they did.

There was a Farm Bureau that sold two-hundred-pound sacks of wool all over the country. My grandfather had a store where many goods were openly sold in barrels. No canned merchandise in those days.

KI: Like what kind of stuff was sold in barrels?

Ralph: Oh, we sold all kinds of hardtack candy, dried grains, crackers, soda crackers, but not like the ones we have today.

KI: What were they like?

Ralph: To me they were better flavored, a little larger than today's regular crackers. There were some cookies. They weren't very good. By the time we ever got lettuce or spinach, it was almost wilted. We had a lot of onions and potatoes. They were local grown. That's why I told you about eating spinach, that was when we were able to get it locally, otherwise, in the wintertime, we didn't have any of that.

KI: Recently I've been editing a book, and there are stories in it about people coming down from Blue Mountain to Vernal to get fresh produce. What would they be getting?

Ralph: They would be getting tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, peas. We had a lot of them. I even had them in my backyard. I had two beautiful apple trees and an apricot tree and a pear tree. At one time we had some of the most famous apples grown in the whole country. They were grown right on the rim of Maeser. On that little sidehill there was a fabulous orchard. They shipped those big delicious apples all over. 'Course they disappeared, oh, fifty years or so ago.

KI: Why did they disappear?

Ralph: Because the families that grew them left and they used those areas for developing, building. That is beautiful area through there. I think that took care of a lot of the produce they had.

The most popular item we had to sell in those days was one-hundred-pound sacks of flour. Everybody in those days baked their own goods. They baked their own bread, they baked everything.

KI: Did you have a bakery in the store?

Ralph: No, not then.

KI: There was a bakery down South Vernal Avenue.

Ralph: Bert Evans had a bakery, the only bakery in that part of the country, too. We used to buy cinnamon rolls, big cinnamon rolls, two for a nickel.

Chairs consisted of crates that merchandise was shipped on. We didn't have any regular chairs, so people would come in sit on those crates, we had them all around for people to sit on.

All goods came by rail to Dragon, Utah, that was seventy miles away, and were transported to Vernal by wagons. This took a long time, so you can see why we hardly had any fresh vegetables or fragile items in those days. It was dirt roads to Salt Lake City. Took many, many hours to travel the distance. In wintertime it was impossible at times, plus real rainy conditions made it impossible to travel, too, because the roads would wash out.

There were no sidewalks with the exception of dirt paths. Sanitation consisted mainly of outhouses and a few ground wells took care of the water for many people. Refrigerators had ice

to keep things cool, no electricity. Ice was delivered first by wagons, then by old trucks from the iceman.

KI: Was that Calders?

Ralph: Yes, you're right. They had a shop down there.

KI: I read someplace they had their own pond and cut it. Do you know how they stored it?

Ralph: They covered it with tremendous burlap bags with Gilsonite as an insulation. They got the Gilsonite from Bonanza. Yeah, in fact, Calder's Pond was where we used to go and play our hockey games.

KI: So when they delivered the ice, it lasted all through the summer?

Ralph: Yes, it lasted all summer.

Our phone service would be single digit numbers on most calls. Our store had a # 3, a #5 and a #4. Callers would call in, ask the operator to dial #3 or #4.

Virginia Ashton: I'll never forget, he made a call back from Stanford, we hadn't known each other very long. I stood beside him and he said, "Operator, I want to call #3 in Vernal, Utah." I said, "*Number 3?*" I was from California, big, grown up California, never hardly heard of Utah. It went through immediately.

Ralph: This is something interesting, all calls were directed through the operator. Several times, one of the operators would interrupt and say, "Ralph, no, no, that didn't happen that way." That's the truth!

Virginia: That was happening when I came to Vernal. If the operator would call and say, "Person to person call for Ralph Ashton," I'd say, "I'm sorry, Operator, he's not here." Then the operator would say, "Well, Virginia, where do you think he is and we'll call him." That even happened when our children were away at school and they would call home. Oh, it was just hysterical, really, I mean, it was wonderful, a small town.

Ralph: Or they would say, "I don't think he's out of town, I saw him downtown not long ago." With all that added information.

Most homes didn't have electricity. Lamps were very common for lighting and reading purposes.

KI: What kind of lamps?

Ralph: They were oil.

KI: How long did that last? Can you remember when you became electrified?



Ralph: I don't know, probably the late '30s.

Some of the things I remember about human events were old-fashioned bake sales, pancake breakfasts, cook-outs, might be roasting a pig in hot coals in the ground. Rodeo was one of the great occasions. The whole community would be involved. Many of the participants were local, as well as some of the livestock. There were several parades during the year. The Vernal area had many good western musicians that could sing and play fiddles, Jew's harps, guitars, and even washboards.

Yearly entertainment contests consisted of trained dogs, singers, dancers, musicians of all kinds. I remember one time Ned Stringham, who was Bry Stringham's son, won the contest with a dog. I couldn't believe how many tricks that dog could do. He could do everything but wash clothes.

KI: Do you remember when they did Maypole dances out on the courthouse lawn?

Ralph: Yeah, they were doing that in the '30s and early '40s.

One of the great events for us every year was going to the Bear Dance and Indian dances over in Randlett and also in Fort Duchesne and Whiterocks.

Virginia: Ralph, did you mention the UBIC?

Ralph: Oh, no I didn't. The UBIC was one the great events in the entire state of Utah. It was held in Fort Duchesne. There would be probably ten or twelve thousand people that would come to that thing. It was tremendous.

KI: Tell me what the purpose was for that. The UBIC was the Uintah Basin Industrial Convention. What was the industrial part of it?

Ralph: They would have all kinds of art things, all kinds of farm machinery, pulling contests with the horses, softball tournaments, tennis tournaments.

I will have to brag about that. When I was thirteen years old, I won the men's, boys', juniors', and the mixed doubles', about six of them. I won them from the age of thirteen up to the age that I went away to school, age sixteen or seventeen. Anyway, that was a great event. We had players coming from Salt Lake and Provo, a lot of good ones.

KI: So the farm machinery companies would bring machinery in from other places?

Ralph: Yes they would bring those kind of things in from all over. I couldn't believe it because to me to me it wasn't interesting. They would bring in those big teams of Clydesdales horses. They would have probably thirty or forty stands that sold things. They sold all kinds of food, melons, anything you could eat. It was kind of like a bazaar where women made clothing items to show and sell. Kind of like a county fair, they displayed their canning and many talents.

Virginia: What caused it to die?

KI: They still have it but it's just a small thing. Too many county fairs now. Do you remember any pageants that the UBIC sponsored?

Ralph: Oh yes, they had the greatest Indian pageant you've ever seen. I think it lasted about six hours. They had all the dances like you would see, the Bear Dance and everything else. It was a great thing. Then they would select a queen. I remember some of them. I think Jerry Buckalew's grandmother, who was a Curry or related to the Currys, she was one of them.

KI: Our rodeos has become a big deal. It is nationally known. They now have nationally ranked cowboys coming here.

Ralph: Woody Searle was responsible for bringing in good cowboys. He dedicated his whole life to rodeos. He was what made it famous for Vernal.

KI: Was there more interaction with the Utes then? I can count on one hand how many people I know who go to the Bear Dance. People hardly ever talk about it anymore.

Ralph: Maybe it's like what happened to the UBIC. Back in those they would probably have two hundred Indians with the most beautiful costumes you have ever seen.

Virginia: But I thought, maybe the Indians didn't want other people there, that they figured these were sacred and didn't want spectators there.

KI: I know for sure that is what happened to the Sun Dance because they don't let outsiders into the Sun Dance. I don't know about the Bear Dance.

Virginia: I thought I understood that it was really a special thing for them, that people would come and laugh and it was sacred to them.

KI: I think there probably used to be more interaction between whites and Utes than there is now.

Virginia: When I lived there, there was very little interaction. The only interaction I ever saw was when we, from St. Paul's, would go to Randlett to the church there or over to Whiterocks and that is truly all. Once in a while somebody would come from those churches over to St. Paul's.

KI: But that was for church purposes, it wasn't to see what else was going on?

Ralph: Virginia and I went to a thing in Randlett one day and they introduced us to this old white-headed lady. She came over to me and said, "Eve Ashton's son?" She just thought my mother was the greatest in the world and couldn't talk enough about her. I finally asked someone who she was and they said she was the last Ute chief, Pawanee's, widow.

Virginia: Ralph, I remember when we went to the church one time and this old lady just fell all over you and said you look just like your grandfather, don't you remember that? She hadn't even

heard your name, she just came up to you and said, “You look just like your grandfather.” That was so amazing.

Ralph: That was my grandfather Hank Stewart, who was kind of mixed up with the outlaws at different times, different things. Back in those days I was a great friend to the Indians because they would come and put their arms around one another... Old Jack Santyo, he was one of the big wheels out there with the Indians and Homey Secakuku he was head of a lot of the stuff out there. There were so many of them. But I treated them just like I treated everybody else. That’s the important thing. Old Santyo would come in [speaking Ute]. My grandfather was very fluent in the Ute language.

Virginia: Well, you had a lot of Indian customers.

Ralph: We sure did. I think we had all the Indians for customers because my dad was great like that and so was my brother. Virginia was just like she is with everybody, just opened her arms to everyone when she was around them.

The Cuches, remember the Cuches? I remember Forrest, he graduated from Wasatch Academy. He’s about thirty years younger than me.

The two girls that ran the Uncompahgre Tribe, Lena Sixkiller and Lena Iorg, those two have probably been dead eighteen or twenty years or longer. When I was helping Flying Diamond to get all of those oil leases out there, we did a lot of work through those two, and a lot of other people. The superintendent at the Indian Reservation and a good friend of ours, Adaline Logan, who was head of all Indian things, she had the only job of its kind in the country, she was powerful. We spent a lot of time there.

We knew a lot of Indians. Most them were good people, except we had a guy by the name of Wilbur Arrum. They had a paint crew of about five, and to keep our business so we didn’t have to close it down, we had them come in one night to paint. The next morning we got there pretty early and went into the ready-to-wear room where they had been working and they were all passed out on the floor. They had drained all the Mennen shave lotion, everything that contained alcohol, two of them had to go to the hospital in extremely bad condition; all those empty bottles of shave lotion, anything that had alcohol in it.

There was a bar next to us, the Shamrock Club, Hunt Watkins had it. Old Hunt was a pretty rough and tough guy and you’d hear Hunt yelling and we go round there and he’d be throwing drunks out. It was a sad situation.

KI: I want to go back and talk about your mom a little bit. She was born in May of 1899?

Ralph: Yes.

KI: Who were her parents?

Ralph: Minerva Van Wagoner and John Henry Stewart, Hank Stewart. He was about as wild as anyone that ever lived. Maybe Arden [Stewart] told you a little about him. Arden wouldn’t know anywhere near as much as I would about his dad because I was quite a bit older than Arden, so I

remember him. A lot of stories didn't come from him. He was a very kind, wonderful man when he was sober, but when he was drunk, everybody better watch out.

One time around Castle Gate, he went into the bar to get his drinks. They knew him and said, "Hank, no, you've had too much already." "No, I want some more, set them up." "Nope." He goes out, gets on his horse, rode into the bar and lassoed the bartender, hauled him out in the street and said, "Okay, you SOB, now set them up." Which he did.

That, plus some of other escapades, is why my grandmother divorced him. Then she married a man by the name of Neal Hanks. They moved to Nine Mile.

KI: Obviously your grandmother kept the children.

Ralph: Yes. My mother raised the children. She raised her two younger brothers. Then she had a stepsister, Donna, who came in later. My mother was born in a log cabin and all that sort of thing. Took in washing and everything else to help support the family. She was very young when her parents divorced. She put herself through BYU, very ambitious, very beautiful woman.

KI: She became a teacher, didn't she?

Ralph: Yes, she taught at Willow Creek.

KI: Did she get a normal certificate? Do you know how much schooling she had at BYU, how much was required at the time?

Ralph: I don't know. Virginia can you answer that?

Virginia: It was normal. They could go for two years and be qualified as a teacher.

KI: She and your dad married in 1919, right?

Ralph: Right.

KI: Can you remember when you were a little boy, what kind of interests did your mom have, what did she like to do?

Ralph: Work. She worked all the time. In fact if hadn't been for my mother, they would never have had a ladies' department or ready-to-wear department. She took that over and wound up with all the ladies in Vernal as customers because she made special efforts with them. She would call them up and tell them they had certain things they might be interested in. They would come in and later they would say, "I wasn't even interested in buying something, but your mom had me come in and try this on and I would end up buying it." She was a very dedicated, hard worker.

Because my brother and I were in the service and my dad was a sergeant in World War I, on the front lines in France, she did a lot of work in the American Legion Auxiliary. She was a member of Witbeck Post and did most of her work right here in the Vernal area.

Like anything she tackled, she did such a fantastic job. The State had her doing additional stuff and they told her, "Eve, you should run for state president." She said, "No, no." They just kept after her. Finally, they talked her into it and she ran unopposed. That was the first time anyone had run in the state unopposed. Then she became the state department head and she did such a fantastic job there that one thing led to another and she kept having more positions and more positions.

Finally, one of the national presidents came here to one of the conventions. He was so impressed with what my mother had done, he said, "Eve, we've got to have you run for the national president." "No, no, not that," she said. "No way." He said, "Listen, no other state that I have visited has done what you've done in the state of Utah." So one thing led to another and she ran unopposed for the national president. After that she was so much in demand as a speaker, all over. Cal Rampton thought that she would be an excellent candidate for the United States Senate.

KI: Your father died in 1951 and she was elected as the national president in 1952, just after he died. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to see that happen.

In our files at the library we have copies of the *Vernal Express* and they kept up with where she was "this week" and what she had been doing. She only came back to Vernal a couple of weeks the whole year. Was it one year she served?

Ralph: Yes, one year. Then they had her on the United Nations Forum where she served along with Obert Tanner. Obert was one of the most influential men in Utah, a great philanthropist.

Virginia: It was the Freedom Foundation. She was on the board. It is an ongoing organization, you can look it up on the Internet. It is a very patriotic organization.

Ralph: When she was on the board of trustees of Utah State University, Virginia can tell you an interesting story on that.

Virginia: She was on the board of Utah State and at the same time she was instrumental in seeing that the then-Ambassador to the United States from Iran was the then-son-in-law of the Shah of Iran. He was married to the daughter of the Shah at that time. They were later divorced.

Eve was instrumental in seeing that he was given an honorary doctorate from Utah State because, I think this is still true, they have a lot of students from Iran, because of it being so similar in terrain. They come to Utah to study agricultural methods, irrigation and all this kind of stuff.

The next time she was in Washington, D.C., representing the American Legion Auxiliary, he had a lovely luncheon party for her at the embassy and presented her with a beautiful watch on one side and on the other side a likeness of the Shah's face. It was minted when his son was born. You weren't alive then, but it was a big deal when the Shah's first son was finally born. He kept divorcing women because they couldn't seem to give him sons. Fortunately, this last wife gave him a son and he was so elated that he had these gold coins mounted. I have it here. She had it made into a pendant for a necklace. That was a nice little international [event].

Ralph: Another interesting thing with her world travels in that position, is that she became a good friend, not what you call a real close friend, but a good friend, with Madam Chiang Kai-Shek. Explain that to her.

Virginia: These Chinese paintings in the hall are reproductions of paintings that she herself [Madam Chiang Kai-Shek] did. She had them loosely bound into a book and presented it to Eve. After Eve died, we divided them between Ralph and Stew and each of us have half. This is what we chose to do with our half, hang them to decorate the hall, which has worked out well.

KI: After she finished with this National American Legion position, what did she do for the remainder of her life, there were about ten years.

Ralph: She was still in demand for everything.

Virginia: She was still involved with the Auxiliary as a past national president. I don't think she had any other state jobs at that point. She was still in demand as a speaker, often in Washington, D.C.

Ralph: When she died, three of the past national presidents attended the funeral and that was the first time that ever happened. One of them got up and said she was the best president they had ever had.

KI: Can I tell you a story about your mother that you may or may not know? Doris Burton told me that when she was a junior in high school, she went to Girls' State. Eve drove them up there, she spent the week. On the way coming back through Perry, with the fruit stands and everything there, she stopped and bought a bag of cherries. All the young girls were in awe of Eve because she had had all of these great positions. They were sitting there eating cherries and your mom was driving along. She would eat a cherry, then spit the seed out the window. Doris said, "We thought she was so elegant and so perfect and here she was spitting cherry pits out the window!" It made her very real to them.

Ralph: That sounds like my mother. This is not like that, but I came back from the service or somewhere and met my mother in Salt Lake City. She said, "I'm glad you're here because I'm being honored up at Utah State University and going to the football game. I have choice tickets. We will be sitting at the president's table. John Raltson's the coach and I want you to meet him and get together with him." I had my suitcase in the back seat and I said, "What motel are we staying in?" She said, "They have it all arranged. We will be sitting at the president's table." I hadn't even shaved. "And you will be sitting next to us." "Oh, mom!" I reached back in there, I had a bottle, "I can't go in there sober." She said, "Put that bottle down, you idiot." She just thought it was no big deal.

Another one: Each time they had a national convention they would select a nationally known person who had been instrumental in various activities. Brace Beemer was the Lone Ranger on the radio long before television. You've heard the voice, that beautiful voice, with the Pledge of Allegiance.

He was going to give the Pledge at the convention. He was to walk onto the stage, so they had the two of us, my brother is 6'5", I'm 6'3" and Brace was 6' 4" or 5", something like that. It was quite an interesting thing, after we got through, because knowing this famous Lone Ranger we invited him over to the hotel to have a drink. He came over. He said, "Your mother is really something." We said, "In your position, why don't you come out to Vernal and head the parade because it's going to be a big deal." He said, "I can't do that, my manager won't let me do that."

The more we talked, we got things going. He said, 'You know, I just might do that for your mother. Look, there can be no advertising.' He got like ten or fifteen thousand dollars for a personal appearance. "There will be no charge for anything, this is just something I will do on my own."

Hunt Watkins got him a horse for the parade. He said, "We made sure we got you a real tame one." Brace knew better, but he got on it and it bucked all over the place. He got off and said, "Okay, boys, got anything else?"

We were down to the Empire Club and a couple of guys came up to him and were making light of him and he just turned around and whacked this guy across the room. Then he said, "Boys, any more of you want any of that?" He said, "There were two things I had to learn to do: I had to learn to ride a horse and I had to learn to fight. In my position, every time I go someplace there is someone that wants to take me on."

KI: Your mother had a very interesting life. Did she get cancer?

Virginia: She was ill for several months.

Ralph: She still had her sense of humor.

KI: Tell me about your dad now. He was born 6 September 1894. He went back to St. John's Military Academy in Wisconsin. He was one of three boys. Leslie had Lowe, Clair and Rae. Why did he go back to Wisconsin?

Ralph: I don't know. Virginia can you answer that?

Virginia: Well, I really don't know, unless they felt the schools weren't adequate. Military schools were very common then. They were through our years. I had lots of friends that went to military schools. His brother went back there and graduated from Ann Arbor in law. I think probably they just wanted good education. Lowe went to UCLA.

Ralph: He was in World War I, about two years in the infantry, a First Sergeant. He saw a lot of combat. He didn't talk about it. You would have to know my Dad.

Virginia: I didn't know him until 1947. I understand he had all his teeth yanked out in the war. I think that must have troubled him terribly. I know when I first met him he didn't have any teeth in his mouth. I'm still amazed at that.

Ralph: His lieutenant had trench mouth and he went with him to the dentist in France. I don't think he was too much of a dentist. He said, "It has progressed too much and the only thing we can do is to pull your teeth." They didn't have any anaesthetic, so he brought out this bottle of

whiskey. 'Course, my dad couldn't turn that down, he started drinking it too, and they all got drunk, including the dentist. When he got through, which took a long time, pulling the teeth out of the lieutenant, my dad said, "Well, you might as well get mine, too." It is a true story. Mother told me that. He went for years and didn't even put in false teeth. Ate everything.

I will tell you one thing, he was about the least active American Legion man outside of his son here that you've ever seen.

Virginia: Here she was the national president of the Auxiliary. He just wasn't a "joiner." He was a hard worker, an extremely hard worker. He worked all day Sunday, that was his life; that and playing cards. He just didn't have time for civic duties or that kind stuff and obviously, organizations such as the Legion came under civic and it wasn't necessary. But he surely did work hard. That is all he knew.

KI: They had the three stores, one in Heber, one in Roosevelt, and one in Vernal. He originally started working in the Roosevelt one and that is where he met your mother.

Ralph: My grandfather knew, which was true, he knew my dad was by far the best one of all of them for business purposes, so he sent my dad to Vernal to take that over. My grandfather was not a good businessman, even though he had a lot of businesses. When my father took it over, it was almost bankrupt. They owed \$30,000; in those days it was about like ten million today. He was going to take out bankruptcy and my dad said no way. He paid that \$30,000 off over a period of time.

The other brother, Clair, this story is about him, brilliant, brilliant. He was one of the youngest graduates from law school, from Michigan, that ever came out of there. He came back to practice and decided he didn't like it and he went into this kind of business, too. Never was a good businessman.

The younger brother, Lowe, turned out to be a very, very good businessman. He is the one in Heber and his son, Lowe Jr., took it over after that. Lowe Sr. was a very good businessman, very well liked. In fact, when he was in Heber, he was almost everything. A very pleasant individual.

KI: Do you know how Rae and Eve met?

Virginia: I think her sister-in-law [Hazel], who is married to Clair Ashton, I think she introduced them, but I don't know how. She was a close friend of Hazel.

KI: Do you know when they were married? In looking things up at the library there were two dates, 1919 and 1920.

Ralph: Stew was born in 1920 and I know it wasn't a shot-gun marriage, so they were married in 1919. Stew was born in 1920 and I was born in 1922.

Virginia: Eve was twenty when she was married. She was born in 1899, so 1919 would have made her twenty years old.



KI: You told me Rae liked to play cards. Did he go to the pool hall to play with the guys?

Ralph: Did he ever! He played with some of the guys that turned out to be real tough and rough guys, not Butch Cassidy, but Ford DeJournette, Walt McCoy, and others. Some who were friends of the outlaws. Later on, he played with his two sons. I became a good card player. I think the greatest relationship the two of us had was cards.

KI: Did your mom get after him about it?

Ralph: Oooh! Especially when he was playing in the beer hall with all the guys. She would send the two of us up to get him. It was embarrassing because we didn't know any better, we weren't too old. I remember Walt McCoy would say, "Rae, get those kids out of here, we don't need them." She would have a nice meal waiting and... She always had a big beautiful meal for Sunday.

Virginia: Well, just to show you, when I came into the family, I was simply horrified. She worked just as hard as Rae did. She was in charge of the ladies' ready-to-wear, she did the buying, she did the selling. They would allow her an hour to come home and cook; they had their big meal at noon. She would come home, put on an apron, put on a hair net and cook a big meal while the men would sit there with their forks in their hands and tell her to hurry up, we've got to get back. She would throw the food on the table and they would eat. She would eat as quickly as she could, do the dishes, then back to work. It was no fun. I was horrified; I hadn't ever seen anything like it.

Fortunately, she looked forward to summertime. Veda Hislop worked in the school lunch program at Central School and she would have summers off. She would come and do the cooking and washing up and just the housekeeping for Eve so she would have just a little less pressure on her.

KI: I'm surprised she didn't have a girl that worked for the family.

Virginia: Well, that came later, not until Ralph's father died and by that time she had risen up in the Auxiliary, so she was gone an awful lot. Then she hired Stella Workman. She was a dear friend; she was the same age of Eve. They were good friends as well, she helped her. Then eventually she lived in the house with her and was her housekeeper.

Stew was still living at home at this point. He didn't get married till he was thirty-five. Stella would take care of Stew, at thirty-five, do all the washing, cooking, etc. This would free Eve to totally take care of the store in her department and travel with the Auxiliary offices that she had. I marvel at all she accomplished, really.

Not that he wasn't working hard, too, she was working equally as hard, plus having all the household duties on top of it. The washing; the washing in those days, of course, took an entire day. The washing, the rinsing, hanging out on the line, bringing in from the line, and then there was ironing day that followed the washing day. It was not easy to do all that and have a job outside, too.

Ralph: Tell her about the flowers and all that.

Virginia: Eve had beautiful flowers, she was a wonderful gardener.

KI: So, then, the two of you got married in 1947. When you came here, Virginia, to this situation, what did you do? Did you go to work in the store?

Virginia: No, no. I was never interested in working in the store and he wasn't interested in having me work in the store. We met at Stanford, graduated together, and I came back and had terrific culture shock, moving from [California]. Well, I moved from an extremely small town, which is good, but it was 250 feet below sea level in California, up to a mile high. I had never seen snow, had never driven a car until I came to Vernal and had to learn to drive on that stuff.

Ralph: We lived at Millecam's little motel properties up there [801 West Highway 40]. By the time she got through driving, nobody parked in the parking lot because she smashed into every one of them. The thing would start to spin and she would put on the brake and shoooooooo....

Virginia: It's true. I didn't know you weren't supposed to put on the brakes on ice.

Ralph: She is the first one to bring the entire Utah Symphony Orchestra to a small town and that started it. Maurice Abravanel used to get up in the performances and say, "If hadn't been for Virginia Ashton..." Virginia would just sit there so embarrassed.

Virginia: It was extremely different from the way I had been brought up, extremely different. There was a lot of culture shock. Well, if I hadn't been so warmly welcomed by the Ashtons and because of their position in the community, everybody else assumed I must be okay, too.

KI: Did you get involved with St. Paul's [Episcopal Church] right away?

Virginia: Well, not right away, they were the first church that called on me, within a matter of months. It was just re-starting again. It had been closed for many years, so they needed me and I needed them and that worked well.

I was very busy in Current Topics Club which I enjoyed immensely and in the PEO Chapter, which I enjoyed immensely; it provides educational opportunities for women. Girl Scouts, you name it. There wouldn't have been time for me to work, I did so much civic work. And we had four children. I haven't regretted being a stay-at-home mom. I don't know how people do it. I think it's miraculous to have children and have a full-time position, too. I couldn't have done it.

And to entertain for him. A lot of our business was because of the entertaining we did. That was a full-time thing in itself.

KI: Where did you live when you got your own house?

Ralph: We were down on Fourth South between First and Second West, right next door to my family. It was a small one when we started out, we just kept adding on and adding on.

KI: Let's go back for a minute. When you were serving in the war, what branch of the service were you in?

Ralph: I started out by graduating from the Artillery Officers Candidate School in field artillery. Then I went to Ft. Leonard Wood where "Wild Bill Donovan" came along to select certain men for the OSS, Office of Strategic Services. That's behind the lines stuff. It sounded pretty good and they sent some of us to Ft. Riley, Kansas, and put us in the Mule Pack School because part of that branch, they would drop them off behind the lines in Burma or someplace like that. Being a young guy, I didn't know what was going on or anything else. So I was in the Mule Pack for a while.

We had a guy that was in charge of the whole thing. His name was Captain Ben Parker, he just looked like a military man. I had never had a conversation with him. I was scared to death of him. He said, "What are you doing this weekend? Are you going to Kansas City?" "No, I'm staying here." "Well," he said, "My wife's sister is coming to town and we would like you to join us for dinner."

I couldn't understand it. I said, "Why did you select me?" "Because you're the only one that doesn't talk about 'such and such' to women and you don't swear and do all that stuff like the rest of them do. I just thought you were a pretty good guy." I hadn't even thought about something like that and I said that would be great. Two or three weekends that happened and I'd have dinner with them.

He got ahold of me one day and said, "I want to get you out of this thing." I said, "Why?" He said, "Pack Class Number 2 was dropped off in Burma and they never heard from them again." He said, "I don't want that to happen to you." I said, "Okay, but what will I do?" He said, "Well, I hate to tell you this, but you will have to be on your own now. But that would be better than this." I said okay and went on my own.

I wound up in the 112<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team in the South Pacific, which, fortunately, I didn't start there at the beginning because they had more casualties than any other outfit in the Pacific. They lost seventy-eight percent of the original men. I didn't get to them till they invaded the Philippine Islands.

After the cease-fire, when I was stationed in Tokyo, I was playing different kinds of sports and I wound up being the First Cavalry's Special Service Athletic Officer, which to me was the most plush job in the whole service. I had my own jeep, my own station wagon; didn't have to report to anybody, except to General Bradford, and all he wanted me to do was to take over this beautiful complex for just our private things: "Don't tell any of the other officers." Well, this turned out to be where all the important big shots would go when they came from the States, back in the days before of the war, even after.

This kind of fell under my jurisdiction. I tell you this, I had a plush job from then on. In fact, I missed five ships waiting to come home. They finally sent an escort after me and said my replacement had been sitting there for two months waiting to take over. I didn't want to come home. But I did.

KI: Where were you stationed when you came home?

Ralph: I'll go back a little bit. We were supposed to be one of the first ones to invade Japan, that's why I said I wouldn't be here today. So when we landed in Tateyama Japan, I was

appointed to take a platoon of men to a place called Mobara, Japan, to pick up all the war materials and that stuff and destroy everything we could.

That was another interesting thing because I got to meet a lot of big shots in Japan. But in the meantime, before I did that, we went along the beaches where they disassembled the guns. Those guns were about the size of this building. I thought they would have blown every ship we had out of the water, because there is no way our bombers could have taken them out. When they tell me “the bomb” was a bad thing, no, I think it is the best thing they ever did. Sure they lost a couple of hundred thousand people or so, we would have lost at least a million men trying to invade that main island.

So, I’m a big shot—I’ve got my own railcar. You know what it was? It was like a barn on the railroad tracks. There was nothing in there except the hardest benches you have ever seen. There was no such thing as a Pullman car or a soft cushion seat. This was no big deal.

I had some interesting experiences. That’s how I happened to wind up in the position I was in there.

KI: You were in Japan when they sent you home?

Ralph: Yes, I was in Tokyo, Camp Drake, about twelve miles out of Tokyo. That’s where the First Cavalry Division was located. The First Cavalry Division comprised all the cavalry divisions, the Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, and the Second.

This an interesting story: when I was head of the Eighth Cavalry athletic part of it, I played a lot of basketball for them. I got to meet MacArthur and Eisenhower. Another friend of mine from Tucson, Arizona, Harry Chambers, and I were the honor guard for MacArthur in these big parades Tokyo had. I got to meet those two guys.

There was a difference in the two guys. When Eisenhower came in, he put his arm around me and said, “How is everything going?” and all that, shook hands, just like the two of us talking here. When MacArthur came, he checks to see if the salute is right. The conversation he had was not like the conversation that Eisenhower and I had, but I always admired MacArthur. Don’t get me wrong, he was a fantastic general.

One day I happened to be in my office, in the gymnasium. Colonel Still came up, he didn’t like me, he didn’t like all these basketball games and all that stuff. He said, “I’m going to have you shipped out of here one of these days.” That was a shock to me.

I had been going up to Camp Drake, the first headquarters of the First Cavalry Division. There was a guy by the name of Colonel Ethel, who was very powerful and instrumental in different things. Colonel Ethel knew my friend, Harry Chambers. They were both from Tucson. He said, “I’m tired of getting beat by those guys. Do you know anybody that can really play ping pong?” He said, “Yeah, right here.” He looked at me and said, “Do you think we can beat those guys?” I said, “I think so.” “Are you sure?” “Well, if we can’t, the drinks are on me or whatever you want.” So we went ahead and played that way for a while. We beat them all.

Then when I’m getting ready to be transferred, I talked to Chambers about it. He said, “Why don’t you talk to Ethel?” So I told Colonel Ethel about it and he said, “Still isn’t going to transfer you anyplace. What we’re going to do is transfer you up here and let you take over as the First Cavalry Division Special Services and Athletic Officer.”

I will never forget going back to the Eighth Cavalry. This one day Still came sailing into me and I have never been told so much from one man. I couldn't believe it, I just sat there and didn't say a word.

Begin Tape 347

KI: Walter Judd, he was the Speaker of the House?

Ralph: He was in the legislature from Minnesota. She [Eve Ashton] said, "Who was the man you admired most when you were in the Philippines?" I said, "Oh, I guess, Carlos Romulo." He was the one that waded ashore with MacArthur when they recaptured the Philippines, he became one of the most powerful men in the Philippines. Mother knew them both [Walter Judd and Carlos Romulo] quite well, just like some of these other big shots. In fact, at her inauguration, of course, she had Brack [J. Bracken] Lee, who was the governor, a good friend, and Ivy Baker Priest, a good friend, who was the National Treasurer of the United States. I don't want to load too much of this, but I think these are kind of interesting stories.

Brace Beemer, the "all American boy." Ivy Priest was a pretty good-looking babe, she was at Mother's and we came in with Brace. He said, "Where did you get this good-looking babe?" He was quite a rounder.

KI: How did Stew meet Mary?

Virginia: Her mother and stepfather owned some oil well properties that were being drilled in Ashley Field. They came up and became good friends of Ralph's mother and father. Mary had had a bad marriage and was no longer married. Her mother said to Eve, "We ought to get our kids together, I think they would enjoy one another." That's how it started. Mary came up to visit. She was traveling with a girlfriend and drove through Vernal because her mother had raved about Stew so much. She thought, "I ought to see what this paragon of virtue looks like."

Ralph: I get a call at Mother's house one day and she said, "Stew?" "No, this is Ralph, his brother. He isn't here, could I take a message?" She said, "No, just tell him Colleen Hutchins called." "Oh, come on, you're not *the* Miss America Colleen Hutchins!" "Well, yes. Just tell him I called." I said to Stew, "Where did you ever know her?" "Oh, I've dated her a few times." That's the kind of life he lived. He brought a different girl home every weekend.

KI: There is one other thing I have to ask you about him. I read something brief about someone trying to kill Stew.

Ralph: Yeah.

KI: Did they ever find who that was?

Ralph: Two things. One of them tried to kill him in a car, they shot through the car. The other one, this guy's wife was crazy about Stew and Stew didn't want any part of her. She came down to the house looking for him and he wasn't there and I happened to be there. It wasn't very many

minutes later that this guy came with a gun and said, "Where is that Stew Ashton?" I said, "What are you talking about?" "Stew. Where is he? I'm going to kill him?" He went through the house looking for his wife and if Stew had been here, he would have killed him. He would have.

KI: Did he press charges, haul him off to jail?

Ralph: Stew wouldn't ever press charges like that.

KI: Did they ever find out who shot through the car?

Ralph: No, they never did find out who it was.

Virginia: They thought at one time that somebody was target practicing and it was a stray bullet going by the highway.

Ralph: I don't think so. It was just down the street a little by the Energy Center. Stew showed me where it happened.

I was one of the first from a small town to be put on Mountain States AT&T Telephone Board. That was the most prestigious board in the state of Utah. It had all the big shots. Fortunately, I knew two of them. I knew Don Holbrook, who was head of a big law firm, and I knew Walker Wallace, the son of [Glen] Wallace, who owned all of Cottonwood and everything, and was instrumental in so many things. President Thomas Monson was also on the board. He is wonderful and so very capable and intelligent.

Let me tell you a couple of quick stories on Ken Sowards. Ken and I played a lot of basketball together. I did a lot of refereeing. This one particular game was a championship game in the Roosevelt gymnasium between all the churches. Ken hadn't refereed anything really. He was an all-conference center at the University of Utah, but we had this game and just before we got started, he said, "Now, do I take this half of the floor or do I take this half of the floor?" I said, "No, Ken, it's divided this way. So the first half you take this, and I take that, okay?"

Well, I'm a big joker; I get to the center of the floor, and the place is packed. I blow the whistle. Here is Ken, all crouched. I say, "Hey, Sowards, remember one thing: they don't jump in the center of the floor like they used to do in those ancient days when you played." He didn't blow that whistle till almost the end of the first half.

KI: Were you about the same age?

Ralph: He was one year older.

KI: He was on a state high school championship team.

Ralph: I left Uintah when I was a freshman or I would have been on that team.

KI: It was a pretty big deal for him. He thought very fondly about taking that championship.

Ralph: Oh yes. He thought more of that than he did playing for the University of Utah.

KI: You came back from the war and finished at Stanford. What was your degree in?

Ralph: Political science.

KI: Did you always know you were coming back to help with the business?

Ralph: No. I didn't want to and my brother didn't want to. But my father got seriously ill and there was nobody else to step into the business. My brother wanted to be a commercial flyer. You have his story. He was shot down one time and survived another mid-air collision.

We both went into it and neither one of us liked the kind of business we were doing, so we started a couple of other businesses. We started an oil well service supply business we called Ashton Supply Company, and we had a construction business.

KI: Do you remember the gas station on the Cobble Rock Corner? Ashtons owned that for a while. Was it Leslie that owned it?

Ralph: Yes, it was Leslie. From that gas station we went up on the corner across from the old post office and became the Shell agent. That was my dad. He owned the business.

KI: So who was running what at that time? After you had the supply service and the construction business, was your mother in charge of the store or were you managing it?

Ralph: She had just an honorary position. She was very active. We considered her the head of the whole thing.

KI: How did you divide up the responsibility?

Ralph: We had an understanding right to begin with. We both couldn't be the head so Stew became the head because he was better qualified. Later on, we split it up and I became the president of Ashton Supply Company and he was president of Ashton Brothers and the construction company. The two brothers got along so beautifully. We didn't do anything without the other's consent.

KI: What exactly did you do in the oilfield business?

Ralph: We had a lumber yard and we sold big timber. We had 4x12s, 4x16s, stuff like that. The oil companies used them for planks on their locations. We did such a fantastic job of delivering them out to the locations, better than anyone else could get them any place, that one of the guys talked to my brother one day and said, "Why don't you go into the mud business?"

My brother said, "What are you talking about, the mud business?" "Well, servicing the rigs." There [are] probably a hundred different processes of drilling an oil well. For example, if you drill an oil well and you hit rock and you can't go any further, there are certain chemicals you can put down there to eat through the rock. Or you if you hit gas, there is a thing called

bentonite. But the name we had for it was aqua-gel. You would pump that down the hole and that would take care of that particular situation.

I remember one time we had to have stuff to fill up a well that was losing circulation. We went to the river bottom and had guys cut about 10,000 willows and put them in the hole. They would expand. There would be other things, something almost like baking soda, it is very expensive. We wound up being so good at it that we were doing so much better than our competition. I'll tell you what our competition was doing, because it was a very lucrative business: They would buy world travel tickets for the oil customers, they'd buy pickups for them.

Deb Casada was one of the best friends we ever had. Deb would buy boats for them and other things. He had the big construction company. He was my golf partner, we would play a lot of golf tournaments together. We would see what these other guys were doing and Stew and I decided there was no way we would ever do something like that. We had a lot of guys approach us and say, "We'll give you the mud business if you will give us such and such." Well, all we had to do was have one leak out that we had done that and our business was gone.

When we first started it, my brother and I had an old truck. He and I took this truck; it would only hold about 200 or 250 sacks. We would take them out to the location; there would be no roads. I'll tell you that was a pretty tough deal. We did that for a while while we were building up the business.

We found out that is where the money is and not in the department store. So we started getting more trucks and more help and eventually, we went east of town and built on three acres, put in black top, built a steel building and had our own place to store bags of concrete. We wound up with six big trucks. We went to Dunphy, Nevada, which is 550 miles away, to Texas and to other places to bring that stuff in and locate it.

Some of the guys, like Ross Rooks, who was the head of Equity Oil Drilling, wouldn't let anybody else on location except the Ashton trucks. The reason why was very simple. Ross was one of the toughest guys you have ever seen. He was out on location one day when my brother delivered a load of mud by himself. This guy [the one who ordered the mud] hated him; my brother was extremely handsome and all the gals were just crazy about him. This guy had a gal that just fell in love with Stew. He said, "Go back and get another load just like that."

Okay. He goes back and gets another load; there was no reason we couldn't have had another truck out there. Three times in a row that happened over about a thirty-hour period. My brother didn't get any sleep. Ross Rooks just happened to be back on that location on the last one. He didn't really know my brother too well and he said, "Hey, Ashton, weren't you here yesterday on a load?" "Yeah, but they wanted more, then they wanted more." "They what?" Ross went over and canned the guy. He came to us one day and said, "I'll tell you one thing: Any location that I'm in charge of, you guys will have all the business and nobody else." Just because of that one incident. We were very loyal.

We got to know a lot of our competition; we got to know the guys on location; we got to be very good friends with the high and mighty as well as the common guys. We were entertaining the big shots that nobody else could get, playing golf with the guy that was the head of Texaco, all west of the Mississippi, playing with him at Cherry Hills. I was a good golfer and won a lot of tournaments.

That was when my brother had to really take charge of business. Like he said, "All these big shots want to play with you because you're such a good golfer." That was good for us. In



fact, one of the guys in charge of N.L. Industries, that was one of our big bosses, out of New York, they had these big jet planes and everything else. He said, "Let's get rid of those Ashtons, we don't need them. They are making more money than we are on this location." A couple of guys said, "You get rid of them, you've lost us too."

When Ray Adam found out that we were close friends of Homer Rainbolt, who was head of Texaco west of the Mississippi and Alaska, Ray wanted to send out their big jet and fly us back to their hunting and fishing lodge in Pennsylvania. Homer turned this down because he had a policy in his company that didn't allow this sort of thing.

KI: Did you have a business philosophy? What made it work?

Ralph: Loyalty, service, and hard work.

KI: Did you learn that from your father, that philosophy? Because so many people that I've talked to, without any prompting, they will say something about Ashtons: "Do you know that you could call up and make an order and they would just bring it to your house?" They would always tell about the service. Like you said, the little people were just as important as the big people and you treated them all that way. That's what I've heard.

Ralph: Another thing my mother used to say, "Just remember two things: you treat your enemies with kindness, not hate, and don't ever forget a face, no matter how big you get, don't ever forget a face." She was great on all that. Virginia was like that, too. She jumped on me, "We're not big shots, quit trying to be a big shot. You don't have to do this, you don't have to do that." Like I said, if it weren't for [my mother], we wouldn't have been doing business at all. Sometimes we would get high and mighty.

KI: I was interested in those other business you had, too. In 1974 you built that whole Ashtons Square. Why did you decide to do that?

Ralph: Because of competition. Some competition was moving in and we thought we better separate the groceries and the hardware and stuff. That would give us more room. We had the grocery building on the southeast corner and moved the hardware out to the other place. The hardware was in the main building previously. All the parking in back is ours. Our son, Larry, owns that now and does a great job.

KI: What happened in the 1980s?

Ralph: The whole bottom fell out of the oil industry.

KI: Why?

Ralph: To be truthful, it was all phony in the first place. Do you remember when we had ships sitting out there in the ocean and yet there were lines at the gas stations waiting to get gas? Those ships were loaded with petroleum. People don't listen to a lot of these stories. The Shah of Iran and Kissinger and a few others got together and created this whole thing. Therefore, they started drilling everywhere. They didn't need to do all that, they had all the petroleum stuff they needed.

When all that was turned loose, then there was a glut on the market and they didn't need to do any more drilling around here. At one time we had 177 oil service companies in Vernal alone. I'm sure you're familiar with that.

KI: I wasn't aware of that number but I knew there were quite a few. I live in Cottonwood Heights, up by the Maeser Cemetery, I know that a lot of those houses were built in the early '80s because of the great influx of people coming in for those jobs. And almost every one of those houses was foreclosed on because the people lost their jobs. I've seen a picture of my street with all the for sale signs on it. Was it this situation that forced you out of business?

Ralph: We were in debt so far, but debt had never bothered us. What really hurt us, when we borrowed a tremendous amount of money, the interest was twenty percent. When things went down like that...

Virginia: Well, people's shopping habits became totally different. K-Mart was out there and people were going to K-Mart rather than the downtown merchants. The same thing is happening here in Salt Lake and it just breaks your heart to see it happen. The buying public is very fickle. They don't care two hoots about the old-timers. You don't find Mom and Pop's like Ashton Brothers anymore, they just aren't there. You can't buy service anymore in these new stores.

Ralph: We would say, "Go ahead and try this, and if works, fine, if not, bring it back." You can't do that now with most other businesses.

Virginia: Before we went out of business, I remember people would go to Salt Lake to save five dollars on a washing machine, then they would call Ashton Brothers to come and service it.

Ralph: Oh, that would happen all the time. Lynne King, our hardware manager, would say, "Where did you buy it?" "Well, we just happened to be in Salt Lake and..." Lynne said, "Well, you go back to Salt Lake and have them fix it." Then, if they were good friends, which a lot of them were, we would fix it.

Virginia: That gives you a general idea why Ashton Brothers is no longer there.

Ralph: We still have people, when we go out there, say to us, "Vernal is not the same without you people." [Ashton Brothers] was a meeting a place. People would know they would always see friends to visit with, or they would say, "I'll see you at the store."

KI: Tell me about community organizations you belonged to. Virginia told me about Current Topics.

Ralph: I, along with Bud Parkinson, started the Rotary Club. I really wasn't active in stuff like that. I wanted nothing to do with the board of directors of Dinaland Country Club as we never saw eye to eye. I was always a golf fanatic and headed the Men's Golf Association. The board was in real trouble. Hubert Northcut, who used to be head of Halliburton, and I went on an oil run down in the Four Corners area, around Durango and Farmington. When I came back, I was

now on the board of directors of the Country Club. I said, "No way, I'm not going to be on that board." I had to go retrace our footsteps and go back down there, and when I come back, I'm now president of the Club.

Russ Kier, grandfather of Raymond in Vernal, someone told Russ, "Ashton won't do a damn thing, you know him as well as we do." He said, "No, but he'll have everybody else working." Before I got through, I could see that the golf course was in bad shape. I happened to be the commander of the National Guard, so Max Rich, Adjutant General of the National Guard, he was my commanding officer when I graduated from officers' candidate school at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky. We became very close friends here.

So I said, "Max, why can't I use our maneuvers, instead of in the mountains, use them on the golf course?" He said, "Go ahead, I'll tell Cal." He and Cal [Rampton] were good friends. All through school, Max was the student president and Cal was his campaign manager. Cal used to come to Vernal often when he was governor to go on our boat on Flaming Gorge.

So Max said, "Go ahead." I get all this equipment down there working like mad and the petitions started streaming in from the people: This work was going on at a club that sells liquor down there. We had a meeting to see about it. To show you what a great speaker my brother was, they got up there saying this and that about you can't do this, my brother gets up and says: "Ladies and gentlemen, give me twenty-four hours and I'll get a thousand signatures to burn this damn courthouse down." It brought the house down. He was fantastic.

Anyway, I had to remove the National Guard. What am I going to do? I have all this torn up. I had a great idea. I went to the oil construction companies, Casada, Pease and Rod Ross, and said, "Boys, I need you. You've got these companies to do your work and now I want one of you guys to go with me and tell them if they don't do what we're talking about, you won't have them on your location." The only one that was all for it to begin with was Casada, because he was a fantastic golfer. Pease Brothers were great golfers too.

That happened, you can't believe it. We had superintendents and one of the guys came to me and said, "Hey, Ashton, you can't just supervise this thing. You got to show them you can do a little work too."

Okay. Deb showed me how to run this machine. I was running the backhoe and Cat and had no idea what I was doing, but I was showing the men that I would work too. We re-did the entire golf course. Then I said, "What are we going to do with the clubhouse?"

I got ladies' organizations together. They went in and put in new drapes and carpet in the clubhouse. Somebody said, "Why don't we have a patio overlooking the whole thing?" So I got ahold of Cas [Deb Casada]. He said he'd help with it, and I got ahold of Jim Tadlock, he could help. I got ahold of Bill Sweeney, who had a lumber mill, and he furnished all the lumber. We built that with no cost to anybody. We did the entire clubhouse with no cost to anybody. The golf course thing would have been almost \$567,000 that didn't cost one person one dime. We had all of that done. So I felt like Russ Kier said, "Ashton won't do anything." Except I did, I got all those damn machines and men working.

KI: I have heard that the Empire Club owned that.

Ralph: They owned it to begin with. That is where the trouble came, later on. We would have lost it.

Then when the oilfield went kaplooy, and everybody moved out, the golf course was in bad shape. What are we going to do? Well, I hate to do this, but there is only one thing we can do. I got ahold of [Mayor] Av Kay: "I know you're not a golfer, but you have to buy the golf course, the city has to buy the golf course." He said, "We don't want to do that." I said, "Now look, Av, you have now gone into oil business, you've got Western Petroleum. We've got to keep that thing going, that's all there is to it." He said, "What do you have in mind?" "Well, let's sell it to the city." "Have you got authorization to do it?" "You're looking at it." "Okay, I'll see what we can do."

He came back to me about a week later and said, "We can do it, but not for very much money." I said, "About half a million." He said, "Oh, no, they won't even look at that."

Finally we wound up giving it to them for \$120,000. The land alone would have been worth much, much more than that. I regretted it after that, but I thought, "What could we do? We don't have any income in it to keep it going."

KI: Was it the Empire Club that still owned it at the time? Who received the money?

Ralph: The Empire Club did. It was now the Dinaland Country Club that had been dumped in my lap. I'm the one that had to make the decision.

This a funny story. When I first became the president of the Country Club, I met with the Country Club board members, they were all good friends. I had them all assigned jobs. A week later, nothing. So another week later I said, "You've got to have something done now." So I met with them and said, "Okay, fellows, either you go or I go, let's make up our minds." They said, "You're serious." I said, "All you guys do is sit here and don't accomplish one thing. You've got to get your work done."

"Well, okay, I guess we just better resign." I said, "That is exactly right." So I kept two of them. I kept Glenn Cooper and Ken Sowards. That's how we took care of the board from then on. There were good members on it.

So I'm president of the Club. Harold Sargent, who is head of the bank, [which] turned into First Security [later Wells Fargo], called me over. "Ashton, we've got to have the money for this and money for that." I said, "That's fine, Harold, where are we going to get it?" "Well, I don't know, but we've got to have it." "That's wonderful, I'm glad you brought that up because, you know, I'm no longer the president of the Country Club. You are." I threw the keys on the table and took off.

It wasn't forty-five minutes, he was back over to the store. "You can't do that, you can't do that." "I just did it. I don't have anything to do with it anymore. It's yours." "Well, we'll work with you."

That's what we ran into. Dale Jensen, who had the laundry, said, "I've got to have my money for the laundry." I said, "Well, I'll give you the keys to the Country Club and you can have the Country Club." "I don't want the Country Club."

That is the way I was able to handle those deals. Today I couldn't do that kind of stuff, but back in those days—I loved to shock-battle like that.

KI: Virginia mentioned you worked with the Jaycees.

Ralph: I wasn't much of a Jaycee. I was president of the Men's Golf Association. I was president of the Country Club, two terms. It had to be terms to get things done. Then I helped start the Rotary Club, and I was the youngest president of the Uintah Knife and Fork Club. We had about a hundred and thirty members. We always had the old guys like Hugh Colton and Bry Stringham as presidents. When I came in I was only thirty-five or thirty-six. I think I did a pretty good job. I had people come in from all over.

In the Rotary Club, to jazz it up, Virginia and I had different people... Well, for example, we had chief singers from BYU that we had met at Rotary conferences. They had them come and entertain. We did a bang-up job and made it go.

I was very active. I not only played those things, but I refereed and announced and coached a lot of teams. I and Ken Sowards were responsible for getting the bantam league basketball thing started. We were instrumental in building the tennis courts and the baseball fields in the community. I got the first volleyball things started. Being at Stanford, that was where a lot of the volleyball started. That turned out to be a great thing. I don't know if they still have teams that go to the state or not.

Ken and I formed a basketball team. That was an interesting challenge. Phillips Oilers had a bunch of college basketball players, and kept betting us they could beat us. I told Ken they could beat us, no problem. We lacked about two really good players to go with us. There was this big tournament in Rangely, coming in from Denver and Grand Junction. Phillips was still the big powerhouse. I told Ken, "I think I know where I can get a couple real hotshots." I went to the Wastach Front and I got two coaches that had been all-conference players from Utah State. I talked them into coming out and they did it. We went through that tournament and I think the closest game we had was twenty points. We just killed that Phillips team.

Another funny story. When we went out to announce another championship game at Rangely, I was the announcer and Ken was my spotter, he gave me the names of the players, and "Black Bart" Grant Parry, announcer from the radio station. We were going to take care of the whole thing. We made one big mistake: We get to Club 40 at Dinosaur and get three or four belts in us and finally Grant said, "Oh, we should have been ... oh!" We jumped in the car. Everybody was so mad they couldn't see straight. He had to set up his radio stuff and everything. The announcing was going all over, even as far as Heber and all over.

We start the game and I don't know how many minutes into the game, Sowards says, "Hey, Ashton, you've got the wrong team in the lead. What are you going to do?" I said, "I'll take care of it." There was a time out. I say, "Ladies and gentlemen, a lot has happened during that time out, such and such team has now gone ahead by eight points."

I don't know how many calls I got at the store the next several weeks: "Ashton, how can they score during time out?" Virginia said, "Where did you guys spend your time?"

KI: Were you a member of the Chamber of Commerce?

Ralph: No. Well, we had three of our top guys that became president of the Chamber, like Hal Duke, Lynne King and John Schwisow. But Stew and I were basically not active in it because we figured these guys could do it all that much better than we could.

Stew, of course, was a thing by himself. He was the first one that brought the entire Blue Angels to a small town. He became a very good friend with the commander in San Diego. And

he talked him into bringing the Blue Angels out here to perform in little Vernal, Utah. That airport almost couldn't handle those big beautiful jets. He did so many things.

Through his efforts, and I helped him with this, we brought N. L. Industries out to Vernal to hold their board of directors meeting. They had never left the city of New York. What happened: At the Vernal Airport we had five or six of those beautiful jets and people were asking what they were doing here. Well, all the guys on that board were heads of corporations, like Butch Granville, head of Texaco, worldwide. Another guy, head of American Standard, worldwide; the chief executive officer of Citibank of New York. They were all big shots like that. All in their own private jets.

We had a lot of people like Hugh O'Brien, singer Jimmy Rogers, and Robert Redford and his wife for dinner at our place, when Redford was filming *Jeremiah Johnson*. We also hosted a three-state governors convention. The governors and their wives came: the Stanley Hathaways, from Wyoming, the John Loves, from Colorado, and the Ramptons, from Utah. Prime Minister Heath from England and Supreme Court Justice Warren Berger wanted to come, but we weren't able to host them because of our involvements at the time they could be here.

When we were in Monterey, I had the privilege of playing golf with three cartoonists: Charles Schultz, who drew the *Peanuts* cartoon strip, Hank Ketchum, who did *Dennis the Menace*, and Bob Barnes, who wrote *The Better Half*. They were a lot of fun.

I tell you about these people not to brag, but to show you that we had some very high-powered individuals who came out to the Basin.

KI, addressing Virginia: Did you like that he brought these people home?

Ralph: No, she didn't.

Virginia: It was a lot of hard work. A lot of *very* hard work. Mary and I worked all the time at this kind of entertaining. And we never received a paycheck. [Laughter.]

Ralph: As I say, we had many, many important people in Vernal from all walks of life. We had all-American first teams in football and basketball that were friends of ours. Ted Schroeder was a very good friend of mine. He just got through winning Wimbledon, the tennis championship. He came out. He was playing a tournament in Salt Lake and we knew one another.

Stew had a very good friend, Don Burness, who was first team all-American center in basketball in Stanford's 1942 championship team. We had friends in all walks of life, politicians and everything else. They don't have that today.

KI: Tell me why that is. Bry Stringham and Hugh Colton, this whole group of people about that time, were very well connected. Were you well connected because of the people you met at school, or because of the Second World War where you met so many people? Why would there be better connected people then than there are in Vernal now?

Ralph: Virginia, we could come up with an answer for that. Why is it that back in those days we had so much power that they don't have today?

KI: Like in the state, when they had the Echo Park Dam controversy. Bry Stringham and Hugh Colton, I think, paid their own expenses to go back and lobby Congress. Such a thing just doesn't exist now. I wonder why that is.

Ralph: Well, like a couple of things that Stew did. They couldn't bring all these high powered oil rigs through the state because of certain restrictions. Stew could call up Cal Rampton, call up Jackson, who was head of the highway patrol, and they say, "Okay, Stew, go ahead." You just can't do those things today.

KI: Maybe it was just more personal interactions, where now there are so many regulations.

Virginia: I know the Utah Symphony hasn't gone to Vernal in I wouldn't know how many years. We had them twice. It took so much work and it took people who were willing. [It was] absolutely a gamble that they were going to sell that many tickets in order to be able to afford it. A lot of people worked hard to do that. But apparently nobody is willing to lay their lives on the line and devote that much time to it to get them here. But you see, things like that, you couldn't do that in Vernal today.

How is Ora Fae Oviatt and how is her group coming along?

KI: They perform all over the place. They are in the paper all the time. Her students participate in competitions and do well.

Virginia: I'm delighted to hear that. She is a person who has worked long and hard to put music first and foremost in Vernal.

Ralph: I wanted to say one more thing. When we had speakers come out for the Knife and Fork, I told my mom, "All they are doing is bringing speakers from Salt Lake. You're a big shot and you know a lot of big shots, can't you get us a couple of good speakers?" A few of weeks later she said, "I got you a couple, now brace yourself for this. Walter Judd (he was the Speaker of the House of Representative from Minnesota) and now who was the man you admired most when you were in the Philippines?" "Oh, I guess you've got Carlos Romulo?" "Yeah." "Oh, Mom, I can't believe that." "Yeah, I got Carlos."

These two came out and we had people from Salt Lake and all over to hear these guys. I'll tell you, that Carlos Romulo is the most dynamic speaker I have ever heard. Carlos Romulo was the one that waded ashore with MacArthur when they recaptured the Philippines. Mother knew them both.

They wanted to bring the Negro Ghost softball team into Vernal. We had a softball league of about seven teams. Some of the greatest players in the whole country were oil people, because softball had kind of folded up nationwide. The Ghosts said there would be no competition, so there would be no reason to come. I got ahold of Sowards and said, "Sowards, take care of that." He said, "What are we going to do?" I said, "Let's get the best players we can." We went over to Rangely and talked to all these great players, and they *were* great. Some of them had been all-pros, back in the old leagues, back in the a big time.

We finally convinced the Ghosts to come. Speed Williams, the head of the team, told us that since they beat everyone they played, they'd take it easy on our team. For two innings they did that, until they realized that our team was real competition. Then they had to work their hardest. At the end of the game, our oil team won 1-0.

Speed complained because his team had won eighty-five straight games and didn't want the loss on their record. He asked to go a few more innings to see if they could beat us. We



agreed and played longer. Finally, they scored and we ended with a tie. Speed told me that the game was, without a doubt, the toughest game they had ever played.

End first taping session; the next session was on 19 September 2003.

KI: I'm with Ralph Ashton today. He is going to tell us a story about the Gibson Hotel and other businesses in downtown Vernal.

Ralph: My mother's uncle, Newt Stewart, was about five foot nine and his brother, Hank, was my grandfather. He came into town, he didn't live here, and he spent the night at the Gibson Hotel.

He was down visiting my mother the next day and his mouth was bleeding a little bit and she said, "Newt, what happened? Did you cut yourself or anything like that?" He said, "These damn teeth are just tearing me to pieces, they never have worked right. Every time I bite into meat or something like that my gums bleed." She said, "Well, have you done anything about it?" He said no. That afternoon some man came to our house and asked if Newt Stewart was there. She said, "No, but he's coming back in just a few minutes, he went to the doctor, his teeth were killing him." He said, "Those aren't his teeth, they're mine. He's got my teeth and I've got his!"

They were up there taking a bath and took their teeth out and they always put them in a glass with stuff in and the glasses were right next to one another. Newt got his and he got Newt's.

I have never seen Mother laugh so hard in my life.

Newt came one day to my mother's house and said they were busy up to the Gibson Hotel and he needed a bath. She said, "Come on in, we can fix you up in here." He called her and said, "Eve, come in here, I need something." She said, "Not with how you are." He said, "Well, I'm not naked, come on in." He was taking a bath with all his clothes on.

KI: Was he drunk?

Ralph: Yes, I'm sure he was..

The old-time businesses we had in those days were from Main Street coming from about four or five blocks east up toward town and a little further past. We had the courthouse and the jail. I'll give you a funny story on the jail later on, then I'll come back to this other thing.

I was constructing the tennis court (I can't remember who the other one was in that area) and I needed some help and went to Carl Staley, he was the marshal. I said, "Carl, can I have some help from the prisoners with this manual stuff?" He said, "Yeah, I'll give you three or four of them. Will that be enough?" I said, "That will do it." He said, "When you get through with them just dump them." I don't remember [all that] he said. So I had these prisoners working all day long and I said, "Okay, boys, you're all through, I'll see you later." Carl got ahold of me at the house that night and said, "What did you do with my prisoners?" I said, "You told me to turn them loose." "I meant turn them loose from the job. Now we've got to go find them again!"

Then, right from the courthouse and jail was the Uintah Stake Bank, it was on northeast corner of Vernal Avenue and Main Street. Right across the street from that was the Ashley Valley Co-op, and just north of that was the Uintah Railway.

KI: The building is still there, they have never torn it down. Somebody bought it and they started taking the stucco off the outside, but they haven't really done anything because those bricks are crumbling.

Ralph: Then there was the old Les Ashton Hardware, my grandfather. Then the old Commercial Hotel. There was John and Mae Jorgensen. Then John Jorgensen had the Thirst Parlor where everybody did their drinking and card playing, it was quite a card place.

KI: You told me one time your Father liked to play cards, did he go there?

Ralph: I'll tell you who my dad played with. You didn't realize what famous outlaw connections they had. My dad played with Ford DeJournette, Walt McCoy, and one of the other old-timers; old W. A. Banks would sit in a game once in a while, what's his name, Hislop, an old-timer, I don't remember. Anyway, that was the Thirst Parlor.

KI: Was that's down by the old post office [92 W. Main]?

Ralph: Yes. Irvin Eaton's butcher shop was just before the Thirst Parlor. Up the street a ways—we're doing all these old, old buildings—was the first doctor we had in that part of the country, Dr. O'Donnell, she was a lady. She was on the corner where True Value is now and behind that she had a tremendous barn with everything known to man in there and that is where we used to play as little kids. We would get ourselves in trouble with some of that stuff in there.

KI: Tell me some of the stuff she had in there.

Ralph: She had old formaldehyde things to preserve things and we'd get into those things. A lot of bones—everything—and we'd take them out and play with them. There were human bones. Why she had them, I don't know, unless it was a study of cadavers and that sort of thing.

On the other side, coming up from about the same area, except on the south side of the street, was Russ Montgomery. He had a wool and hide building, it was a great big thing. He did tremendous, sometimes he'd have two or three hundred bales of wool in there, sometimes baled hay, but mostly hides and pelts, that sort of thing.

KI: Was that right across from Dr. O'Donnell?

Ralph: No, we're down on 5<sup>th</sup> East now. Showalter Ford was by far the oldest automobile dealer around, one of the oldest in the state, I guess it was. A little later on they had the Utah Motel owned by Fran Felch and Tom Karren. Then, coming up further, they had the Cobble Rock Service Station, which was the oldest of its kind in that part of the country. Then the Bank of Vernal and that was part of the Coltharp Building. Ashton Brothers Company was in that same complex, in the Coltharp Building. Then right next to the Ashton Brothers Company was the old sheriff's office. It was one of the oldest buildings, it was a frame type.

KI: Do you remember who the sheriff was when you were a kid?

Ralph: Let me think now. The marshal was Lafe Richardson and the sheriff was Emery Johnson.

KI: The sheriff took care of things outside the city limits and the marshal took care of things inside the city, is that right?

Ralph: Yeah, but the ones they had in those days, back in the early days before I was around, Billy Preece and John T. Pope, they were fantastic lawmen. They would go over to Robbers Roost looking for outlaws, go everywhere. They were very brave men. They never fooled with the Butch Cassidy gang and the Butch Cassidy gang didn't fool around Vernal as long as those guys were the law, even though Butch and Elza Lay did drop in once in a while. A good friend of mine, Harvey Murdock, is the grandson of Elza Lay and is still alive, living in Salt Lake.

KI: Tell me what happened with the old sheriff's building when Ashton Brothers expanded into it.

Ralph: We tore it down and when we were tearing it down there were a lot of papers and things like that in the old walls, between the boards. How they got there, I don't know, but we got them out. Two or three of them I gave them to Robert Redford to show him that Matt Warner was fined a dollar for shooting up the town and a few weeks later he was fined a dollar for beating up on four or five guys. He was a tough individual.

Further up [west], there was the Farm Bureau, but right across the street, as you get to that corner from the sheriff's office, make a left and go down about fifty feet, would be Carl Hadlock's blacksmith shop. That would be Main Street and First West. I mentioned Gibson Hotel. Right across from the Gibson Hotel was Bert Evan's bakery. That was the oldest bakery. You could buy cinnamon rolls, two or three for a nickel; they were big ones. That's how we would eat our lunch. We'd get ten cents to take care of our lunch and we would get two or three cinnamon rolls and pocket the nickel.

KI: Were you supposed to buy lunch at school?

Ralph: They didn't have it at school then.

KI: Then your teachers expected you to go home for lunch or your parents just gave you the money.

Ralph: Our parents were never home, they were both working, so they gave us a dime and we were supposed to go to the White Kitchen Café. We were supposed to go in there and get a bowl of soup because we could get a bowl of soup and crackers and stuff for ten cents. We wanted to save a little bit of money, so we would get the cinnamon rolls and pocket the nickels.

Several times we would go in there and think we had to have a little more money for whatever we were going to do. We would take the cinnamon rolls and take off and Bert Evans would catch us and say, "You boys didn't pay me for the cinnamon rolls." "Yes, we left the money on the table, somebody must have taken it." He said, "There wasn't anyone here. Where the hell is that money?"

KI: Who is "we"?

Ralph: Well, there would be Clayton Findlay, Paul Stringham, Cliff Carter. There was a little old grocery building, just kind of a stand, and we would divert the attention of the owner and the other one would grab a couple of apples and away we would go. We finally got caught on that too.

KI: Was the Confectionary there yet?

Ralph: The Confectionary came in—Taylor owned the Confectionary. The Confectionary came in just a few years after what I'm talking about here. It came a little later. He had the first pinball machine ever manufactured, a couple of them. A guy by the name of Harold Alexander showed me how to fix them so you didn't have put money in; kind of a lever-type thing. We would get in there when nobody was looking and pull that lever thing. Somebody was asking old Taylor one time, said, "Taylor, those machines are going all day long, you must be making a fortune out of them." "I can't believe it, every time I go to get the money, there is just a few coins in there."

KI: You were wicked, weren't you?

Ralph: I really was.

KI: Further west up Main Street, you told me, were the houses of Mother Adams and the Ratliffs.

Ralph: Yeah. Ma Adams was quite a figure back in those days. She wore a little white sailor hat and she looked just like a monkey, just exactly like a monkey. But she was very kind-hearted. She had an old, old, I can't remember the name of the car, one of the first cars ever in this part of the country. It was the second oldest car, because my grandfather had the first one here, a Buick, and everybody knows what happened to that Buick. Dick Ufford uses it in the parades here. I didn't know till Dick told me.

Ma Adams had this car with running boards on both sides, but they had little bits of molding standing straight up so that when you stood on the running boards you weren't in danger of falling off, you could always brace yourself.

Well, we'd get about five kids on each side of that thing, that old vehicle would be packed in there tight. We had about fourteen or fifteen people in that thing and it would almost sink to the ground.

KI: It was a touring car?

Ralph: Yeah. Every once in a while it would hit bottom and we'd have to get towed in, when we went swimming, I can't remember the hole, it was down on Ashley Creek, but it was a nice little place to swim.

Then right above where the Adams' lived was the Ratliff home. That was by far the prettiest house in town at that time. J.H. Ratliff, he came in from another part of the country to prospect for phosphate. He located the first phosphate up there. That is where the phosphate plant is now. It's still going.

To all these buildings there were hitching posts for the horses, most of the transportation back then was wagons and buggies. We used to hitch onto some of those buggies in the

wintertime to ride with our sleighs. Sometimes those real tough old guys would use their whips to really lash into us until we dropped our sleighs.

KI: Like up Main Street?

Ralph: Yeah, we'd go up Main Street or wherever. In other words, when they would be in trading or whatever they would be doing, we would wait for them to leave so they couldn't see us and then we would hook our rope on and be ready to go. They would catch us almost every time but we held on.

We hitched on to Josie Morris one time. Boy, she let us have it. She stopped and got after us, and that's all we needed, we took off. 'Course we didn't know how famous she was. Later, [when I was still a kid] I carried her groceries out to her buggy from the store.

KI: Tell me when the Pig Stand came in.

Ralph: The Pig Stand came in the late '30's.

KI: Was it fast food even then? You just walked up to a window and ordered?

Ralph: Most of it was fast food, yeah. They had another one just across the street west from the post office. Lynn Pack had a root beer deal, where you could walk up and get your root beer and sit at little tables there.

KI: Only root beer, he didn't serve other food?

Ralph: They called it root beer. I don't remember what they had, I don't remember if they had food or what. Back in those days we didn't have money, we just got what we could.

Later on, cafés came in, like Jim's Café. It was just east of the Farm Bureau. Then the old Red Front Garage, which was where McKinley Motor came in later; then that's where Bradshaw had his auto parts later [Basin Chevrolet]. It was a big old red building.

KI: Where was it located?

Ralph: It would be just this side of Dr. O'Donnell's place, halfway down the block.

KI: There is a motel down there now.

Ralph: The Red Front Garage was right across from the Farm Bureau.

KI: That's where the bowling alley is.

Ralph: Yes, that's exactly where it was. At the Red Front Garage, isn't it amazing, I remember the guy, Charley Tucker.

KI: Didn't Henry Schaefermeyer have the Red Front for a while?

Ralph: Yes, he did. I think he probably took it over from Tucker. He could have been the next owner. Is he still alive?

KI: Yes, he is. He's pushing a hundred, he's about ninety-six or something.

Ralph: There was another garage that opened pretty close to this time and it was called Vernal Motor. A guy by the name of Archie Lewis, pretty smart guy, he sold it to Tom Karren and Fran Feltch. That's where the garage was.

KI: Vernal Auto was just down on Vernal Avenue, too, right by the Cobble Rock. Several different people owned it, including Ashton's. I think it was supposed to have been your father because it became Ashton Service for a while.

Ralph: Yeah. Shell Service opened just west of the post office. We owned the Shell Service Station.

KI: If I remember correctly, Les Ashton had the Cobble Rock for a while, then he opened the Shell, I don't think he bought it. I also remembered something about him doing a road rally. They had people come in from Colorado to do these big Denver-to-Salt Lake events, fifteen miles an hour.

Ralph: I remember. No, Les didn't have anything to do with the service station, that was my dad. Les had the Cobble Rock. My dad was the one that started the Shell. What he did, he traded my uncle, my dad's brother, the service station he had for payments on the trucking line when we started the trucking line. Then we took over the café. It was right in the Coltharp Building itself. Right by the bank. It was called the City Café. We took it over because they owed us so much money. We operated that for about three or four years.

KI: When you say you operated businesses like that, Ashton's became the owners and then you just hired managers?

Ralph: Yes. They always wound up stealing us blind, so we got out of that business. You couldn't find very honest people, except when we got those old-timers in our business, which I mentioned: Dick Tiffany, Sid Morrison, Vern McCarrell, and George Walker, just to name a few.

KI: Tell me about them one at a time.

Ralph: Okay. Sid Morrison was well known as being an operator on Diamond Mountain.

KI: What kind of an operator?

Ralph: Sheep. He was with us about twenty-seven years. I think the only job Sid ever had with us was the night watchman. He stayed there all night long, in the business, to take care of it.

Vern McCarrell was our manager and he was tough. We had a big wheat bin that we would take on barter system back there and we would get two or three of us in there and play. He

would come out there and grab us by the nape of the neck and pull us out and jerk us around. We were scared to death of him.

Finally, one time, we did a little bit of stealing and stuff like that and he knew we did.

KI: From your own store?

Ralph: Yes. He came and said, "I want to talk to you boys." He said, "Did you boys take this and that?" No, no, we sure didn't, we wouldn't do that. "Well, I guess I will have to ask the Ouija board." I'd never heard of a Ouija board. "I'll ask the Ouija board. It always gives the truth on exactly what has happened. Let me get my Ouija board." We stood there. He gets his Ouija board out. "I'm afraid you boys are guilty because the Ouija board says so." I guessed we were, but we didn't mean to.

Let's see, Vern was with us about twenty-six years. Dick Tiffany was our grocery manager and he was with us about the same amount of time.

The old hardware store moved across the street, that's when my dad just came back from the service, World War I, and my grandfather was quite ill, his health wasn't very good at all. My dad took over and he didn't like that hardware business. He thought he could do better than that because there was no grocery store around and there was no clothing store of any kind. He opened the grocery business across the street. He was going to bring in a butcher and have a butcher shop. My mother talked to him and said, "You would put poor Irvin Eaton out of business. [Eaton had a butcher shop on the north side of the street.] Why don't you talk to Irvin and hire him?" My dad talked to him and he was just tickled. "I'll get all my stuff and move over there."

KI: Did the grocery and the butcher shop go in right in the beginning of the 1920s?

Ralph: Yes. He didn't hire Irvin Eaton till the first part of the '30's because we didn't put the butcher shop in till then. Then they put in the clothing. That was one of the first stores in the whole state that had that sort of thing. That was the first time they had groceries, butcher shop, hardware and clothing under one roof.

KI: Was your dad the general manager?

Ralph: He was the owner and he had managers over each one of them. Vern McCarrell was the general manager over everything. Dick Tiffany was over the groceries. I guess my mother actually operated the clothing. Then we got the ladies clothing and my mother operated all that with Eva Pope, who just died at one hundred years old a short time ago. Eva Pope worked with my mother over all the clothing. She was actually over it.

Sid Morrison was with us about twenty-seven years, George Walker about twenty-two years.

KI: Who was Eva married to?

Ralph: Wendell Pope. He died quite young.

Virginia: Did you tell Kathi we thought of the reason for things being different in Vernal? Well, it just hit us as we were driving along. You asked us a question about why there was more zip or zing in those days, you know with the Sowards Company and bringing in people from the outside and Ashton Brothers. We decided it was that there aren't any of those locally owned, vibrant companies out there anymore. They are mainly chain, where the owners do not live there and they don't have a stake in the communities, they are just simply managers.

KI: Like True Value, even Milt's has gone to selling Ace stuff, Ace Hardware.

Virginia: The trouble is the managers never feel they can take it upon themselves to invest heavily in some sort of a local venture. Gosh, Ashton Brothers had these wonderful fashion shows to raise money for whatever, school. They were constantly doing something for the community, whereas if you're just a manager and it's not your business, you can't go out on a limb and say let's do this or that. It's good for the community. We think that is where the big difference is now.

Ralph: After she brought that up, I said, "Virginia, that's exactly right." The businesses would get together and say, "Hey, we've got to put some money into the tennis courts, money in the ball fields. We've got to have big celebration days." Like the turkey days where we used to throw turkeys off buildings and all that kind of stuff. Big events all over town; we boxed food for poor families. It was nobody except the heads of businesses and corporations that were home owned.

Virginia: Small Town, USA, is not what it used to be.

KI: A little detailing business just opened up in Vernal. You take your car there and they clean it inside and out and then they will bring it to you. It's not going to last, you can tell it's not going to last. Every time something like that comes up and it's a home-grown venture, they just fall by the wayside.

Ralph: You can't get that kind of cooperation from Wal-Mart, Cosco. You just can't get service at all. Back in the old days, just take our business. In the hardware building, Lynne King can tell you, he's the last one alive we had in there, every employee we had in there knew how to operate everything we had. If someone came in and bought something and it didn't work, if you had any trouble with it, bring it back. It got to the point that we'd have guys come in and say, "Lynne could you have someone repair this?" Lynne would say, "I don't remember selling that to you." And the guy would say, "Oh, no, we bought it in Salt Lake." Like damn fools, we went ahead and repaired them. That's the reputation we had. We never said, "Okay, go back to Salt Lake."

We did that in the clothing department. Ralph Rolfe, Hal Duke, those guys knew clothing from A to Z. They knew texture, they knew what a person should look like or should wear. Hal Duke was one of the best looking guys in a hat you've ever seen. It was a joke. He sold thousands of hats and nobody had a chance to try them on. He would try them on himself and he'd look so good, they bought them. That's no joke. We'd sit there on purpose and watch him. "Okay, Matt, how does that look?" "I like that; try that other one on. Maybe I like that one better." The only one that tried them on, and it was always a hundred-dollar Stetson, was Woody Searle. Woody had a big head and if Duke put it on, it would come down over his ears.



KI: Did you finish telling me who worked there?

Ralph: Lee Bennion was a bookkeeper for about twenty-seven years. Hal Duke was with us for thirty-four or thirty-five years. He was head of men's wear. Lynne King was with us about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years over the hardware. Ralph Rolfe worked in the clothing for about twenty-two years. Iva Wilson, head of the children's department. Another real good one up in the office was Ada Jensen Edwards. Her father was an old, old cowboy, Marcus Jensen. He used to be the foreman of the Preston Nutter ranch out in Nine Mile. He was an old rough and tough cowboy. He was famous. He never dressed in anything except cowboy stuff. He was a great tobacco chewer, he would spit the juice all over.

Ada and I went together for a while. She married a guy by the name of Bob Edwards. He came with the oil. He was a competitor of ours. We were the Baroid agents and he was the Magobar. We opened that big complex down, right across from Halliburton and Dowell. We had three acres there and blacktopped the whole thing, put big buildings there.

KI: Did Ada only work for you until she got married?

Ralph: When I quit dating her, she quit working for us. I didn't want to get married. I wasn't the marrying kind then anyway. I liked to date a girl one week and another girl the next week. In fact, I was dating Marge Crandall when I introduced her to Ken Sowards. She was the Miss Sweetheart of Sigma Chi at the University. She was a beautiful girl.

Ken and I played basketball on the city team, also on the city's softball team. I got him on the city's volleyball team. Anyway, the only two guys that are still alive that played on that team are Keith Squires and myself. I think we had the best basketball team that came out of that part of the country. I'll tell you how we got it.

That's when all the big oil companies were doing great in Rangely. There was a company called Phillips Oilers. They had two or three university players and they were good players. We had beat them in softball and they said, "Wait till the basketball season comes around. See what you boys can do on that." 'Cause they knew what they had. We watched them play and I told Ken, "We can't beat them." They came by and said, "Do you guys want to play us for about a \$100 a man, if we get in that tournament?" We hadn't even entered the tournament, a big tournament, in Rangely, but they came from Colorado and every place.

I told Ken, "I'm going out to get a couple more players. We need two real good players to go with Ken, myself and Keith, he was about 6'7" or 8". I went out on the Wasatch Front and got two all-conference players from Utah State University, Tom Fullmer and I can't remember who the other guy was. We entered the tournament and Phillips hadn't ever seen these guys. We were killing everybody. Before we met them in the finals, we had won every game by about twenty-two points.

KI: How old would you have been at this time?

Ralph: Thirty-one or thirty-two, something like that. We met them in the finals. And big mouth here said, "Do you boys still want to put up \$100 bucks apiece?" Boy, they really let us have it. We slaughtered them. They said, "Where did you get those two guys?" I said, "I took them off the farm."

That had to be the best basketball team. We beat all those teams from Colorado. There was one other team from Vernal that entered. Jack Woodbury, coach at Uintah High. They got beat the first round. They had a lot of Vernal players that we didn't use.

KI: Was there somebody on that list that comes after Ada?

Ralph: Yeah. There was Lorna Anderson Thomas. She sang all the leads in all the operas at the high school from the time she was a sophomore on up. They wanted her to go to some college to sing. She had a great voice and she lost her voice. Could never sing anymore. We used to talk about it years later. She married Bill Thomas, he had the lumber company. They are both dead now.

Erma Collier became one of the top gals in the office.

KI: Would that be the same Collier that had the furniture store?

Ralph: No, but she was a cute little girl. Her parents that had the White Kitchen Café I told you about, we used to go to. That's where I first met Erma. Erma was a classmate in the seventh and eighth grade before I had to leave to go away to school. She was the head gal in the office just like Ada and Lorna. The bookkeeper was Lee Bennion.

KI: One of things I have been told by a few people I have talked to, Philip Martin comes to mind particularly, is that when his father died suddenly, his mother went to work at Ashton's. Several people have told me that. Something horrible happened in their lives, especially if the husband died, and the women were given a job. Milt Searle told me that after his father suddenly died, his mother went to work at Ashton's. It just seems to me like there is a pattern here of helping people who really need the help.

Ralph: We did that. Ethel Martin was her name. She was a very attractive woman. Phil was good looking. When he was young, he was extremely handsome. He started Martin Water Hauling Company. They did extremely well because Phil was well liked by everybody.

Do you remember Ethel Martin's home? It was a beautiful home. I used to deliver groceries to her all the time. She would say, "Come on in," and she would have cakes or something like that, say, "Sit down and visit." I loved to visit with her. Pretty soon she'd get a phone call: "Is our delivery boy there, Mrs. Martin?"

KI: I think it was an admirable philosophy, of not just providing people with service, but providing them a way to take care of themselves, people that were down and out, especially these widows.

Ralph: I remember going to dances at the Imperial Hall and people would have bottles in the trunks of their cars. That disappeared. I don't remember seeing that after the '60s. A big reason they did it was when everybody went to the dances [they couldn't drink]. There was Imperial Hall and then they had a dance hall at Victory Park, between Gusher and Roosevelt. It was a great dance hall, just the same as the Imperial Hall, everybody out in their cars during intermission.

KI: Tex Ross told me one of the reasons they had to close down the Red Barn was because people just kept going out and drinking out of their cars and getting so drunk they had fights. It was a fight all the time. It just wasn't worthwhile to hold dances there anymore.

Ralph: They [Tex Ross and others] were our painters when we were in the construction. Then the Young boys became painters, Ervin, Bert, and Bill.

In our construction company, Dan Oaks was head of the lumberyard and later head of the mud supply business, and Lyman Merkley was the foreman in the construction business. Brig Swain remained with our company until his retirement. He, like the rest, was an outstanding employee.

KI: In the construction business, what were you constructing?

Ralph: We did practically all the oilfield buildings in Rangely; we did all of Phillips, we did all of Stanolind, all of the Bonanza homes, the Catholic convent in Roosevelt. We built a couple of subdivisions in Vernal. We built probably a hundred homes around. We lost money. Why? Because some of the guys we built homes for were great customers in the different departments we had and they wouldn't pay the full price for the construction of the home. They said, "If you want to keep our business..." What we should have done was said, "We don't want your business. We want full price for the home." Art Boren was one of them, he had crews all over and was a tremendous customer. We thought, "Geez, we couldn't afford to lose that for \$2000 or \$3000."

Well, we were by far the biggest contributors out there for anything. There wasn't anything we didn't participate in or lead in. I remember for Christmas deals we got all the merchants to go with us to make up boxes for the poor. That lasted for two years and doing it by ourselves, it got a little bit expensive.

For Thanksgiving we'd buy all these turkeys and get up on our roof and send them out there. You should have seen those people. That was one of the highlights of the year. The people that caught them were tickled to death. We would send out pretty close to a hundred and that was expensive.

Then we'd have guys that entertained. You remember Fireman Frank? We'd have him or Santa Claus, and give them something.

KI: What I don't understand is if you were bartering with people and they didn't pay you for six months or a year at a time, how did you keep the business afloat?

Ralph: That's why my dad and mother were never able to build a new home. They lived in a nine hundred square foot home all the time, until my brother and I put an addition on the home years later. But my mother always wanted a new home down on the corner, had the plans for it and everything else. Dad would say, "We just don't have it."

My brother at one time was the youngest Eagle Scout in America. He did it by the clock and he waited till the last minute and got his papers in. He was written up in the Salt Lake Tribune. Well, we were to go back to Washington to the Jamboree and we had made all the arrangements and then Dad came said, "I just can't afford to send you guys."

You know, I don't think anybody ever paid him more than once a year. I remember when Phil Martin came in. McCoy's the same way, Cliff McCoy, Walt's son, Bry Stringham, all of

them. Like N.J. Meagher told him, “Rae, you could be a wealthy man if you’d be on my board of directors and quit doing this and that.” He told N.J. and he told N.J., “If I didn’t do that, you wouldn’t have any business.”

KI: How difficult it must have been for everybody to have to weather those big dry spells with no cash, and people still needed to eat and came in wanting to have things on credit.

Ralph: It wasn’t easy. People thought those Ashtons were sitting there worth millions, just because of all the outgoings and that sort of thing. We still had to pay our bills. That’s one thing my dad said: “As long as I live, I will pay every bill I owe.”

Oh, when he took over the business from my grandfather they were \$30,000 in debt and it was in the Depression. The banker wasn’t N.J. I don’t remember who it was, but he said, “Rae, you’ve got to take bankruptcy for the business.” Rae said, “I won’t do that.” It took him about ten years and he paid it off. Thirty thousand bucks in the Depression, a lot of money.

My dad wasn’t the smartest guy in the world. We were out at Rangely one time, I was thirteen years old and [there was] a guy by the name of Jack Stewart. To drill the first wells out there, Standard Oil wasn’t drilling any wells in California at that time anyway, so Jack Stewart was a big powerhouse. They came out with these crews and they were the biggest high-powered crews they ever had.

Jack had built a house just before you go into the town of Rangely. I’ll never forget, we were out there for dinner and Jack said to my dad, “Now, Rae, you’re going to have the deal of your lifetime. Let me explain what the situation is. This is going to be a fantastic oil field, the whole thing. We know from this well here what’s here. Now I want you to grab all this land you can and I will pay for it. It can’t be in my name. I want you to do it and I’ll have the money for you just as quick as you find out how much land you can get.” My dad didn’t do it! Rangely Field!!!

KI: Tell me about community celebrations you remember, parades and things.

Ralph: We used to have parades down Main Street and we would have seventy-five to a hundred floats. Real floats, not elaborate like they have in Salt Lake but these were things that people would work on for months. We would have a couple of our big trucks in there, decorated and have people ride on them. We were always part of the main thing. They would have not only the band from Uintah High School, but bands from all parts of that part of the country. Clowns, entertainers, singers. Kids participated, dressed up. Kids dressed up as Uncle Sam, on stilts. A lot of wagons and buggies. I remember John W. Pope. He got the first car, I don’t remember what kind, but he put that in the parade and people came out to see that. That was before Salt Lake even had vehicles.

KI: John Pope brought the very first car into Vernal.

Ralph: My grandfather bought the first Buick. The one that John W. Pope had, I don’t remember, it had mirrors on the fenders. I was just a little kid and whenever I went down to that garage he was always showing it to people. It was something special. He was a good friend of my dad, older than my dad.

Dick Ufford can tell you exactly when he bought that car from my grandfather. I see he uses it for all parades, grand marshals and everything.

KI: You mentioned something to me about delivering groceries out to Bonanza.

Ralph: Back in those days we had the only type of business of its kind in that area. We had customers from on the mountain, parts of Colorado, the Basin itself, and we had so many customers from Bonanza. They said, "We have to come in here all the time and you have all our business, why don't you deliver groceries out there?" My dad said, "We'll do it." I became the delivery boy and I would have about sixty deliveries out there. They would call in their orders, we would fill it, and I would deliver it. Had it stacked on top in the truck and had to make sure it was packed just right.

One time out there, N.J. Meagher's daughter, Peggy, she was a little bit older than I was, but she wanted to ride out there with me one day. As we were riding, I put my arm around and pulled her over and we went off the road.

KI: What happened to the groceries?

Ralph: Fortunately, they were okay, but we were stuck. We had to get pulled out. What happened: People came along with chains and pulled us out. Meantime they called in to the store and wondered what happened to their orders. My dad wasn't too happy, said we needed to have a little talk.

I covered this with you before about when I was on the telephone board. I got all those lines cut down from eight parties down to two or individuals. You see, when you get on boards it [helps]. Well, I was the one that volunteered that and nobody came to me. People came to me and said, "What's it going to cost us to do this?" Geez, I didn't even think of that. What's going to be the charge to them? "Just because of what you have done, we aren't going to charge them, we can absorb it. It really isn't going to cost us that much, we needed more lines out in that area anyway."

KI: Please tell me stories about what you think is significant in Vernal's history.

Ralph: My great-uncle Lynn Ashton was a fantastic ball player, they came after him and offered him a big league contract. 'Course he had never been out of the area.

KI: How did they find out about him?

Ralph: Because they played in Salt Lake City and the word got out. He never did do it. I think he was afraid to leave the area.

My uncle Clair Ashton, my dad's brother, went to the University of Michigan. He played first base on the college team and another guy by the name of George Shisler was on the same team and they drafted the two of them into the big league. My uncle decided he didn't want any part of it. He came back to the Basin. He had his law degree, was always going to be a lawyer, but he never did practice it. What happened to George Shisler? He went on to become one of the greatest baseball players of all time.

KI: Did you always educate your children in Vernal or did you send them out, too?

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Ralph: I'll let Virginia take over. Tell her about our children, where they went to school and all that.

Virginia: The children went to school in Vernal through the eighth grade. Then we wanted them to have a little wider exposure to life in the outside. So our two boys went to Webb School in Claremont, California, which, at that time, was just a boy's school, a very fine academic institution.

KI: Was it close to where you grew up?

Virginia: Well, relatively close. So if they had a weekend off, they could go down and stay with my mother or my brother, which they did a lot. I had an uncle and aunt living there. It was a really good feeling.

Larry loved the school so much that he kept in very close contact with it and is now chairman of the board of the paleontological museum that they have there, that is the only accredited paleontological museum on a high school campus in the United States. He goes to the board meetings frequently and stays in touch.

Mike, the oldest, started going there. He was the first one to go. When he graduated from Webb, he went to Stanford. He graduated from there in 1971. He was musically inclined and he said, "Before I could earn money, I would either have to get my Masters or PhD." Because he graduated in English. He said, "I'd like to try and see if I can make my living playing the piano." And that's what he did.

He started with this very, very successful show in San Francisco, *Beach Blanket Babylon*, that has been running for over twenty years now. He was the first musical director and orchestra conductor, [for] almost seventeen years with them.

Having gone to the Stanford campus in Germany, he loved Germany and became very familiar with the language. So he said, "I have done all I can do in San Francisco and I know in order to do more in my musical field (which is musical theater), I would have to live in L.A. or New York, which I don't want to do. I would rather go to Germany." So, he has been working and living over there for twelve years. Gets home at least twice a year and our other children get over there to visit him.

KI: Is he married?

Virginia: No. He's foot-loose and fancy free. I guess he likes it that way. I can't imagine, with a schedule such as his. I can see why show business marriages very seldom succeed because he works all night and also works during the daytime. Anyway, he is not married.

Ralph: *Beach Blanket Babylon* was the most successful show they have ever had, it's been a sell out ever since it started. They have so many famous people that come there, I won't go through the stories how these happened, but because of these particular stars, they wanted him to accompany them on certain things, Mary Martin and Beverly Sills.

Virginia: Mike blazed the trail at Webb, then Larry went. Larry lives here in Salt Lake. Ginny, our oldest daughter went to Colorado Springs School. At that time it was also just for girls, now it is co-ed. Graduated from there, then went to Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, for two years, then came back here and finished at the University of Utah.

KI: What did she study?

Virginia: Psychology. She has a bachelor of science degree. She is the mother of two daughters. Her husband has Tres Hombres, which is a Mexican food restaurant. She also works part-time as a real estate agent.

KI: And Larry?

Ralph: He got his MBA. He's a pretty bright individual.

Virginia: He's a business consultant. Our second daughter, Marjorie, went to Bishop's School in La Jolla, California, finished there and started at the University of Utah, was married, went back with her husband to the University of Iowa where he did his residency in hand surgery. She graduated from the university while she was back there. They came back to Salt Lake to live, now, with their four boys. She's just being a mom. That's the four of them.

Ralph: We feel pretty proud. All of us graduated from college, the whole family. Which is unusual.

KI: It is. Especially at the time period that you grew up because it wasn't as necessary to have a college education to get anywhere then as it is now.

[Pause]

Ralph: My brother and I were consultants for N.L. Industries, which was one of the big corporations during the oil boom. We became good friends of the "big boys" in it and we talked them into having a board of directors meeting in Vernal, Utah. We would go to the mountain and do whatever could be done. It was the first time they ever had a board meeting out of New York. [They were headquartered in New York.]

What happened, before anyone knew it, they had five jets landing in that airport. People from Salt Lake came out and asked us what was going on. We would go down and meet them all. Well, they had the chairmen of the boards of some of the biggest corporations in America. We became pretty good friends. Butch Granville, who was head of Texaco worldwide was there. Herb Schmidt, who was head of Citibank in New York, was there. Bob Schwartz, head of America Standard, was there. Paul Linet, who was head of Litton Industries. They had their own planes. Two or three others, I'm trying to think of the big wheels that were there. It turned out to be quite a thing because they had never had anything like that in that part of the country, hardly in Salt Lake.

We took them up on the mountain. We gave them really a first class deal of everything. Then we had big festivities at my brother's place a couple of nights. But they said they had never

had such an enjoyable time or been so lavishly entertained. The forest people on the mountain opened up a space they didn't open for anybody.

I wasn't involved with the Blue Angels, but my brother was the first one to have the Blue Angels perform in a small town, the Navy Precise Team. We had them out. They were the greatest people in the world. We had a tremendous time. Three weeks later they were performing in the state of New York, two of the planes hit head on and ended up killing two of the best ones. Then the guy who was the commander and friend of my brother insisted that he go to combat in Vietnam and he was shot down the last day of the war.

We were written up in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in three big articles, Stew and I, of the things we had done. That thing with that convention was one of the best. I went to get my physical yesterday and this guy said, "Hey Ashton!" It was Cal Rampton. Cal and I visited and he said, "I miss you guys. I miss coming out to Vernal. That brother of yours was one of the all time greats." He and Lucy Beth came out occasionally and we entertained them on our boat.

Cal asked, "Do you remember when we had the three governors' convention on your boat at Flaming Gorge and that had never been done before?" I said, "Yeah, I'll never forget when Governor Hathaway [Wyoming] later became head of the BLM." He came down the gang plank with his beautiful blond wife and I walked up to her and gave her a big kiss on the mouth and said, "It's been a long time, but do you remember all those days, honey, we spent together?" All these people watching and Stan Hathaway got the biggest kick out of it. Governor Love from Colorado and his wife came. That was just some of the things we did.

KI: Was Stew on any other boards?

Ralph: Stew was head of the State Aeronautics Commission. He was on the a Board of Equity Oil, the board of Questar, what used to be Mountain Fuel. He turned down Equity Oil because he was on the Questar board. He was there before I was on the telephone board. I couldn't do that stuff today if I had to.

I told you about Miss America?

KI: No, I don't remember that one.

Ralph: "Is Stew there?" "No, he isn't, do you want to leave a message?" She said, "Tell him Colleen Hutchins called." "You aren't the Colleen Miss America, are you?" "Yes, just have him call me, he knows my number." When Stew came, I asked him, "When did you date Colleen Hutchins?" "How did you know?" "Well, she called." "Okay, I'll get back to her."

I'll tell you another one he dated. Did you see the *Sound of Music*? Do you remember the beautiful blond that was going to be the wife? He dated her, that Eleanor Parker.

One time I was in Salt Lake. I was married and he said, "I wish you were single, I have three stewardesses out here and I don't know what to do with them."

You didn't ever see him, did you? He was extremely handsome. Like Cullen Christensen said, he was better looking than any movie stars. He had all these gals.

KI: How did he decide to marry his wife?

Ralph: That was strange thing. She is a lovely, lovely lady, but he had all these high falutin' girls, and I think he just wanted to settle down with a real person that wasn't like that.



The head of Exxon Oil called him and said, "We are going to Alaska to meet with Governor Hinckley to see about the oil before they start drilling up there. We want you to go with us." This great big plane that was just lucky enough to be able to land in Vernal, Stew gets on there and I recognized two of them: Burl Ives and General Westmoreland were there. When they came back, I went to pick up Stew and they said, "Come on in and look at the plane." General Westmoreland said, "It's good your brother was along. Foul-mouthed Burl Ives, he couldn't sing anything unless it was filthy and he couldn't tell jokes unless they were filthy. Your brother took over immediately." He was a hell of a singer, he had a great reputation, great entertainer, just like that.

When we were back at a wedding in North Carolina, Virginia's cousin's daughter was married. "I think one of your old friends is here, Westmoreland." "He was my brother's friend, not mine." "Well, he wants to see you." I went over there and he took a picture of us. It was framed and sent to me.

I told you about Hugh O'Brien? He had been up on our boat. He was the one that played Wyatt Earp. When we went to the Country Club for dinner, Hugh was supposed to leave, Stew called the airport and said, "Will you wait for us?" Stew said, "On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, I want to present you with this." He picked up this great big thing and dropped it in his lap then presented him with something else. Then we went to the airport as fast we could, they had kept the plane for ten or fifteen minutes. He gets in his seat and said, "I need to get rid of you guys so I can get some rest." Stew goes and picks up the stewardess and drops her in Hugh's lap.

Jimmy Rogers, you remember that name? He and I became very close friends. I was playing in a golf tournament at the Broadmore in Colorado Springs. I went over there for a practice round. The guy that was head of the whole thing said, "I have another guy that you would enjoy playing with. He wants to play a few holes with you." I said, "Okay, fine." So we played a few holes and people kept coming in and asking us for autographs. I said, "What the hell's this guy's name? I forgot." He said, "It's Jimmy Rogers." I said, "Who is Jimmy Rogers?" "He has written more songs and performed. He is the headliner down here at the International." When we got through playing, he said, "How about having dinner with me tonight?" He introduced me to Randolph Scott. He was a good looking guy. We had a great time.

When Jimmy Rogers came to Salt Lake to perform, he called me. So I took him out to play golf. I had Jack Gardner, who was the basketball coach for Utah, and Obert Tanner, who had the big Tanner deal. So the four of us played. Jimmy and I kept a friendship for a few years.

KI: You've had a crazy life, haven't you?

Ralph: Yeah. Then at my wedding everybody thought I was just big time dropping names. But one of the wedding party was Ted Schroeder, he had just finished winning the United States Open and the Wimbledon Singles Tennis Championship. He and I had been friends for years. Then Bob Rosburg, who was my roommate and fraternity brother at Stanford, was the nation's number one amateur golfer. He's still on television, doing a lot of television.

Another one was Bob Blatt, who was the nation's number one skier. National Collegiate skier, later on in the Olympics. Rhoda Ramsey, the Ramsey Group, the big real estate, she put that together, she wrote our big deal for the wedding when we were married. Virginia said, "Please don't tell who all those people are." Rhoda said, "They already know who they are."

They were just my friends, not because they were big shots I wanted to be with. They were just good friends.

And Charlie Bluhdorn, who was the president of Gulf and Western, flew a big plane out here that used to belong to Howard Hughes. We had them down to dinner. His wife and Virginia and I were talking and she said, "Oh, that's right, you owned Paramount Studios." Bluhdorn was an immigrant who came from Hungary. He started that company, Gulf and Western, became one of the big companies in the whole country.

There are people like that. I don't talk to a lot of people about that because they think I'm just name dropping. I knew you would be interested in that.

KI: Well, they are people who ended up having connections with Vernal, too. It's interesting: They know where Vernal is because of you guys.

Ralph: Well, I had Billy Casper, one of the best golfers in the world. He came out the next day after winning the U.S. Open, after beating Arnold Palmer in San Francisco. We were in the butcher shop in the store getting some stuff and Vern Mott said, "You look just like Bill Casper." [He said,] "If I'm not any better looking than he is..." Vern told me later he must have made a mistake. I told him that it was Bill Casper. Vern said, "He was just playing in San Francisco yesterday." I told him, "Yes, he flew out and we're going fishing." It was good for Vernal, getting all that publicity.

KI: Well, Ralph, I really appreciate you sharing all your stories with me. We'll be happy to make this part of our historical record.